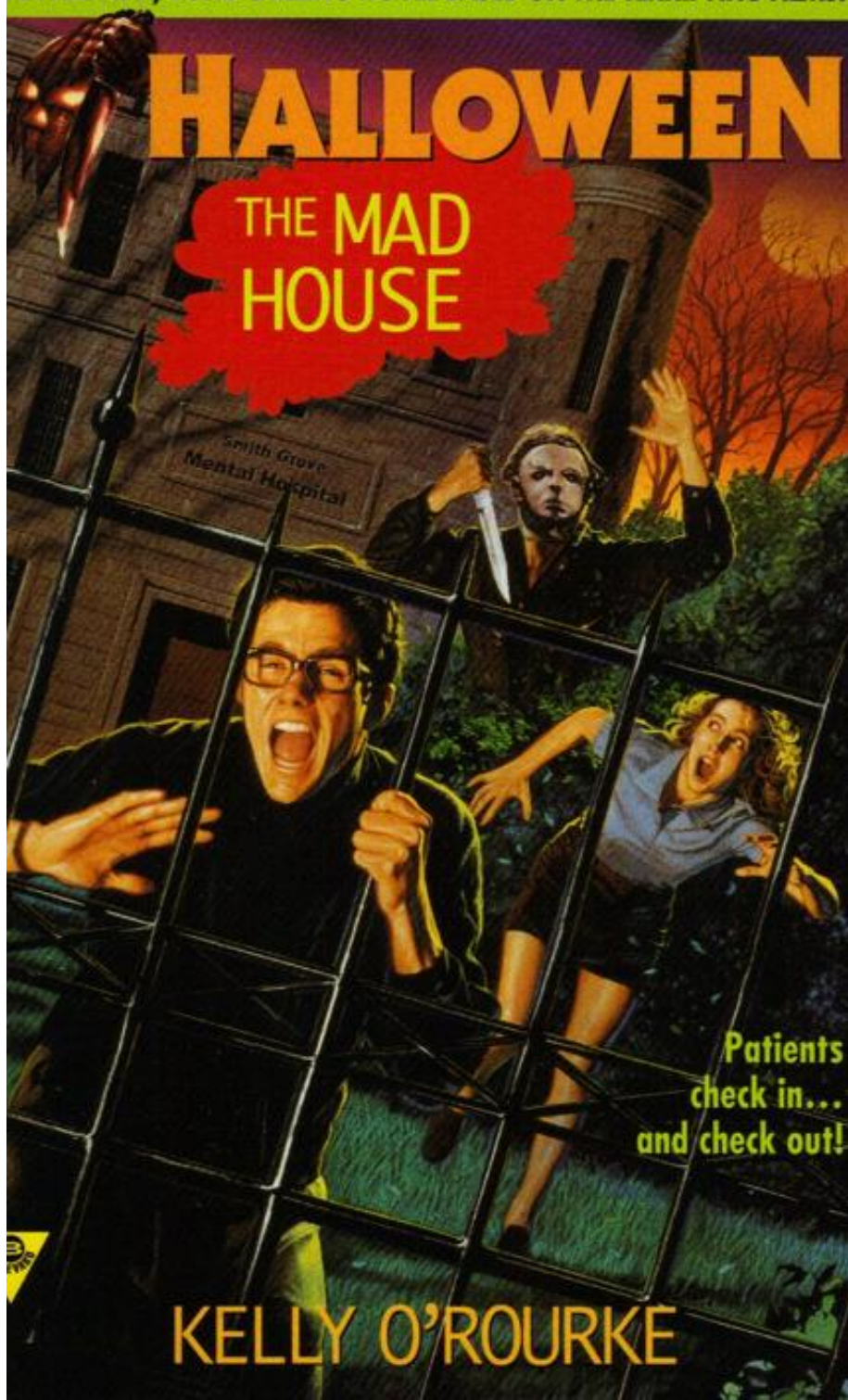


AN ALL-NEW, BONE-CHILLING NOVEL BASED ON THE TERRIFYING FILMS!

HALLOWEEN

THE MAD HOUSE



Patients
check in...
and check out!

KELLY O'ROURKE

PROLOGUE

Eddie silenced Christine as a banging and vicious growling noise came from downstairs. "The front door! Someone's breaking in!" Eddie whispered, panic rising in his throat.

The horrible sounds from below made the hair on the back of Christine's neck stand up. "We've got to hide!" she cried, unable to stop trembling.

Eddie picked the first door he saw and began tugging and clawing on the board that nailed it shut. Christine dug her nails into the wood and helped him pull.

The front door downstairs burst open with the sound of shattering glass and splintering wood, which echoed through the cold, still corridors of the building.

Christine looked wildly around just as Eddie was able to rip the board loose and open the door. The couple slipped inside and slammed it behind them. Inside the room was a counter and several glass cabinets mounted to the walls. Eddie set the camera on the counter and searched for something to use as a weapon.

Christine's entire body was still shaking. "Someone is killing people! Someone is—"

Eddie's heart threatened to explode as the sound of heavy footsteps walked down the hall outside. He spun around and waved at her to be silent.

The footsteps stopped outside the door.

Whoever was out there knew that they were inside.

The stench of rot and blood wafted under the door as the thing sniffed out their scent like a crazed, wild animal.

"Oh god!" Christine whispered. "He's here!"

A hulking figure shrouded in the dark shadows stalks the dusty, deteriorating corridors of the abandoned Smith Grove Mental Hospital.

Within the building, he waits silently, frozen in time, frozen in hate... for trespassers upon his sacred territory.

CHAPTER

1

The hot August wind blew through Christine Ray's hair as she pedaled her ten-speed bicycle up the grade toward Main Street. Her tanned, aching legs silently thanked her as she parked the bike in front of Sam's General Store.

A string of tinkling bells clanked against the door when she pushed it open and she caught a glimpse of her flushed face and damp, blond curls in the glass. "Maybe I should drive next time," she mumbled to herself. Christine ducked inside the musty, air-conditioned store and headed straight for the ice-cream freezer, hoping that she wouldn't run into anyone she knew looking like this.

She pulled a crumpled ten-dollar bill from the pocket of her cutoff denim shorts and paid for the frosty red popsicle she'd already unwrapped and popped into her dry mouth.

Christine collected her change and exited the store. She collapsed on the wooden bench out front and savored the sweet, frozen treat, trying to forget about the long ride ahead of her. The thermometer nailed to the wall outside the old-fashioned store had inched up to nearly one hundred degrees, a record for the tiny town of Haddonfield.

The air was so humid and still that Christine could hardly think in the suffocating heat. No one was outside today, not even children. The last bite of popsicle slid off the stick and tumbled across her white tank-top before it hit the sidewalk and instantly turned into a pool of glistening liquid. "Great," she said and sighed.

Christine was frustrated. The long summer vacation that she'd been looking forward to all last year had turned out to be nothing but one big bore. Sure, she'd gone swimming at the lake and camping a couple of times, but it had been no way to spend the last vacation before her senior year at Haddonfield High.

Nothing exciting ever happens to me, she thought.

To make matters worse, she felt like the only girl in town without a boyfriend.

Christine was pretty and popular, but just couldn't seem to find anyone who sparked her interest. She'd gone out with a few boys from school this summer, but all they could seem to talk about was themselves. She figured that her sights were set just a little too high for what was available in this town. She wanted a boyfriend who could keep up with her ideas and actually listen. The dream guy that she imagined would also be drop-dead gorgeous. So far, no one around here fit the shoe.

Christine was looking forward to going back to school and taking on the challenging senior editor position at the *Bee Sheet*, Haddonfield

High's school newspaper, which she'd passionately worked on as a reporter in her sophomore and junior years.

Against her will, her mind suddenly shifted to a dark area that she tried not to think about. She recalled the award she'd been given at the end of school for the "Good-bye, Friends" piece she'd written for the Bee's final issue. It was an emotional story about the lives and accomplishments of several students who were murdered last Halloween...

Despite the hot weather, goose bumps dimpled across Christine's arms as she tried to forget about the horrible tragedy that had emotionally scarred the entire student body of Haddonfield High last fall. The unthinkable night mare that had happened right here in this town—again.

She tossed her popsicle wrapper in the trash can and looked at the colorful collage of business cards and flyers tacked to the cork bulletin board outside the store. As she scanned the usual advertisements from dentists and carpet cleaning services, a fresh note card handwritten in black ink suddenly caught Christine's eye and her attention.

She read the unusual message aloud: "Volunteer film crew needed for documentary on haunted sites. Spend the night at the Smith Grove Mental Hospital... if you dare. Credit, meals and video copy provided. Call Eddie. 555 3982."

Christine's green eyes were sparkling with curiosity as she reread the card several times, not quite believing that this exciting opportunity was less than six inches from her freckle-dusted nose.

"This is it!" she whispered. "*This* is what I've been looking for all summer." Christine memorized the phone number and repeated it to herself as she pedaled her bike home through the cruelly hot afternoon. She dumped her bike by the front porch and went inside to call the phone number which promised adventure.

Eddie Baker jumped up, dropping his copy of *Fangoria*, when the phone rang. He picked the special effects magazine up from the floor and pushed aside a pile of screen play pages that he'd been editing atop the cluttered student desk in his room. He snatched the phone from under a stack of comic books on the fourth ring.

"Hello?"

The female voice on the line took him by surprise and he instinctively brushed his dark hair out of his eyes and straightened his tortoiseshell glasses. "I'm trying to reach Eddie," the girl said.

Eddie cleared his throat, wondering who the voice belonged to and why she was calling him. "This is Eddie Baker. Can I help you?"

A breathless, rather sexy sigh entered his ear through the receiver.

"Oh good. This is Christine Ray. I saw your ad on the notice board and want to volunteer on your documentary. Are you still looking for help?"

Eddie twisted the phone cord nervously. Just hearing the name Christine Ray made his pulse rush. She was one of the hottest babes at school and she wanted to help. This was too good to be true. "Uh, yeah. I'm still looking," he answered.

"Great. It sounds so exciting. I can't wait to hear all about it," she said. "So what kind of help do you need? What's your documentary about? When are you planning the trip?" she asked.

Eddie smiled to himself at Christine's enthusiastic questioning. If he had known that a girl like Christine was interested in ghost hunting, he'd have posted the notice at the beginning of summer. "Saturday night," he answered. "Look, can you meet me at the diner later? Say around six o'clock? I'd rather tell you about the project in person."

"Can't wait," she chirped. "Bye."

"Uh... Bye."

Eddie hung up the phone and shook his head. He couldn't believe he'd just set up a date with Christine Ray! Well, sort of.

He'd had a major crush on her last semester.

"She probably doesn't even remember me from biology," he mumbled. But then he reminded himself that *she* was the one who'd just called *him* and now *couldn't wait* to meet him.

Before Eddie could answer the knock on his bedroom door, Maggie Grossman poked her head inside. "Hi, Eddie," she said. "The front door was open, so I let myself in."

Maggie had long, stringy hair that looked like it hadn't been washed in weeks. She was overweight and always wore dark, baggy sweatshirts and pants that only made her body look bigger.

"No problem. What's up, Mag? What are you doing here?" he asked.

Maggie pushed aside a pillow and flopped down on Eddie's unmade twin bed. "Duh, Eddie! The camera equipment? I came over to help you clean it. Remember?"

"Oh yeah," Eddie sighed. "It slipped my mind. I've been so busy planning the trip and all," he explained.

"Who was on the phone?" she asked. "I thought I overheard you talking to someone."

A huge grin spread across Eddie's face. "Just someone who wants to help on the film. I'm going to meet her later."

"Her?" Maggie blurted out. "I mean. Oh. Cool."

Eddie noticed that Maggie was blushing and he could see a hint of jealousy smoldering behind her eyes. He knew that Maggie liked him as more than a friend, but she was more like an annoying little sister to him. She was definitely not his ideal girlfriend. The two of them had spent almost every night this summer in his bedroom watching *Star*

Trek reruns or *Mystery Science Theater*. Maggie was always tapping her fingers and talking during the shows, which drove Eddie crazy.

She'd been acting especially weird ever since last week. They'd just finished watching *The X-Files* when Maggie had suddenly planted a hard kiss on Eddie's lips. Eddie was so startled, he knocked over his soda and finally shoved her away, after she tried to push her tongue in his mouth. It had been an awkward and embarrassing moment for both of them. Especially when he had to tell her that he wasn't interested in her that way. But she'd quickly explained that watching David Duchovny had just gotten her totally hormonal. Maggie didn't seem to mind that Eddie wasn't into it and it certainly hadn't stopped her from hanging around. It were as if she was just pretending that nothing had happened.

"So, are you getting a lot of calls from the ad?" Maggie asked.

Eddie grinned again. "That was the only one. We can use all the help we can get."

"Yeah," Maggie agreed. "Do you mind if I tag along to the meeting later? I mean, it would be kind of cool to meet a girl around here who's interested in filmmaking and ghosts like we are. Besides, I'm not doing anything later."

You're never doing anything except following me around, Eddie thought cynically.

The last thing he wanted was for Maggie to be there tonight. Her abrasive personality was really getting on his nerves lately. Besides, Christine might get the wrong idea or Maggie and her motor mouth might say something stupid or embarrassing. "No, Mag. I don't think so. Maybe some other time," he told her.

The window-mounted air-conditioning unit whirled un comfortably in the silence.

"So, who's the girl, Eddie?" Maggie finally asked.

Eddie decided to play it straight. "Christine Ray," he answered casually.

Maggie's jaw dropped, revealing her crooked front teeth. "Oh great!" she protested. "All we need is some prissy little Barbie doll running around on Saturday night!"

"You don't even know her, Maggie," Eddie snarled. He was getting really tired of Maggie's attitude toward other girls. It had gotten to the point where he couldn't even make a comment about attractive women he saw on TV without Maggie making some snide remark.

Maggie snapped, "I don't have to know her, Eddie. I know her type. The perky, I'm-better-than-you type!"

Eddie rolled his eyes at Maggie's desperate words. "Whatever, Maggie. Whatever."

"Isn't she the one you were crushing on last year?" Maggie teased.

"The one who didn't even notice that you were alive?"

"Just shut up, Maggie," he warned.

"Look," she told him, "I just don't want you to get hurt. Okay? I'm your friend and I care about you."

"What are you talking about!" Eddie exploded. "I'm meeting her at the freaking diner to talk about the project! It's not like we're engaged!"

Maggie shrank back and lowered her head. "Lighten up," she squeaked. "Where's the camera equipment?"

Eddie took a deep breath and pointed to several black cases in the corner. "Right there. Look, maybe we should do this some other time. I've got to leave soon."

Maggie picked up the heavy cases and avoided eye contact with Eddie by letting her stringy brown hair fall in her face. "I'll take them home with me and clean them there. I'll call you later."

"Okay. Whatever you want," Eddie said as she quickly exited the room. He didn't like the idea of letting the equipment out of his sight, but he was anxious to end this bizarre conversation. "Use the special cloths to clean the cameras. No paper towels," he reminded her as she stumbled down the stairs. "They'll scratch the lenses..."

The door slammed shut downstairs. Eddie stared at his reflection in the mirror above his dresser. Maggie was always telling him that he looked like a young David Duchovny. He hoped Christine thought so too and liked that type. He polished the lenses of his intellectual-looking glasses with the corner of his T-shirt and turned on his miniature TV.

CHAPTER

2

Be serious, be professional, be serious, but not too serious...

Christine sat in the parking lot of the diner, psyching herself up for her meeting with Eddie Baker. She wanted this opportunity more than anything right now. Having worked on a real documentary would be an excellent addition to her résumé when she applied to a college journalism program next year. The name Eddie Baker had sounded vaguely familiar to her, but she couldn't quite place it. She felt like a nervous wreck.

Just relax and be yourself.

In the rearview mirror, Christine applied a dab of frosty pink gloss to her lips and brushed her curly blond hair. She wanted to look good.

Christine locked the door of her mom's black Cadillac and smoothed her blue cotton dress, which she wore with a pair of strappy leather sandals. She'd forgotten to ask Eddie what he looked like and had no idea who or what to expect.

Eddie was already inside the diner munching on a basket of fries, dipping each in a small bowl of blue cheese dressing. In between bites of his favorite snack, he would glance sideways every few minutes to peer out the window and see if Christine had arrived yet. He knew what she looked like all right. She had a perfect body, beautiful skin and a pair of wide green eyes that drove him absolutely crazy. All of the guys thought she was hot. And she was. But he didn't want her to know that he remembered who she was. He'd decided beforehand to play it cool with her.

Eddie's heart jumped when he saw Christine walking across the parking lot. Her legs seemed longer and her curly, shoulder-length hair was summer-lightened with golden blond streaks around the temples. He quickly looked away from the window and began seriously shuffling through the papers on his clipboard.

Her soft voice called out from behind and sent a chill down his back. "Eddie? Are you Eddie Baker?"

Eddie turned around casually and smiled at Christine. "Yeah hi. Have a seat," he offered.

Christine slid her lean body into the booth and stared at him for a long moment. She threw her hands up in the air. "Of course! Biology! Last semester. I knew I'd heard your name somewhere before."

Eddie grinned, flattered that she'd recognized him. "Oh yeah," he said. "I think I remember you."

Christine looked at the clipboard Eddie was thumbing through. She felt a little more at ease now that she sort of knew who he was. Eddie was always quiet in class and never said much to her. As she

remembered, he was always wearing funny T-shirts.

Christine giggled when she looked at the T-shirt he was wearing tonight. A giant alien face with almond-shaped eyes stared back at her and the word "Believe" was printed beneath it. She pointed. "I like your shirt."

Eddie glanced down at the neon green picture of the alien and laughed. "Thanks. And I like your dress."

Oh god! What did I say that for! he thought.

Christine smiled politely and blushed a little from the direct compliment. She changed the subject. "Thank you. So, tell me about your documentary."

Eddie straightened up and hoped she didn't notice his own crimson cheeks. "It's a ghost-hunting film. I've spent the entire summer investigating haunted houses. I've been going to haunted locations and staying overnight with my cameras, trying to catch images of the supernatural on film. The Smith Grove Mental Hospital is the final expedition, which will complete the documentary."

Christine widened her eyes. "Wow. That sounds like some summer project. Did you actually get anything on film?" she asked.

Eddie flashed her a smile. "Well, sort of. It's kind of hard to direct ghosts, though," he laughed. Then he lowered his voice to a whisper. "But I have this one videotape with some pretty wild images on it. It was from an abandoned farmhouse in Clark County we visited. The locals say that the ghost of Sadie McClain, a pioneer woman, haunts the place. They say Sadie and her entire family were massacred by a tribe of vicious Indians. Her ghost has been spotted roaming around the old farmhouse for over a hundred years. They say she's still keeping watch for intruders."

"Ooooh. How weird. I think I've heard that story," Christine said. "So what happened?"

"Yeah. It's become regular folklore tale out here." Eddie continued. "Anyway, I went up there with a buddy of mine and we set up our equipment in the old farmhouse. It was about the most boring night of my life. At about four in the morning we fell asleep, but luckily we'd left the cameras rolling. The next morning when we woke up, we found our equipment and videotapes strewn all over the old farmhouse. It was really scary. There were strands of unraveled videotape everywhere and my video camera was smashed to bits! Someone—or something—had gone through our stuff and totally destroyed it."

Christine's eyes were like round saucers. "So what happened? I thought you said you had something weird on tape."

Eddie continued, "I do. I had *two* cameras. I hid one way up high in the rafters. Old Sadie didn't see it."

"Oh my god!" Christine gasped as the hair on the back of her neck

stood on end. "What's on the tape?" she asked.

"Unexplainable phenomenon," Eddie whispered. "It's really spooky. You can see me and my buddy sleeping on the floor. Then all of a sudden, this bright, almost blinding, blue light sort of flashes through the room and then the tape goes black."

"Are you kidding? Wow! Can I see it sometime?" she asked eagerly.

"Sure. But you can't tell anyone about it. I'm not going to release it until I edit and complete the entire project. The trip this Saturday night is the last one and then I'll have covered every haunted site in the state," Eddie said.

"Are you going to sell it?" Christine asked. "I'll bet that tape is worth a lot of money."

"You betcha. I'm going to sell the entire documentary," Eddie said and smiled. "It's funny. I never expected to capture anything on film. This project started out as something to keep me occupied this summer," he admitted. "But now it's turning into a career. I've decided that I want to make films. I want to be a famous director someday."

"Well, it sounds to me like you are a director. You might not be famous yet, but you're a director nonetheless," Christine reminded him. "I'm totally blown away by your idea for this documentary. I wish I'd thought of doing it myself."

Eddie felt really good right now, as if she'd given him a hearty pat on the back. "Thanks," he answered humbly.

"It's true," Christine said. "Most people just sit around and wait for opportunity to knock. You know? You're different, though. You're making things happen." She looked at him seriously. "I want to be a part of this, Eddie."

"You're in," he said and grinned.

"Great" she exclaimed. "I am so excited—and impressed by all of this. So tell me. How can a guy like you afford all these cameras and equipment? I thought that stuff cost a fortune."

"It's not cheap," Eddie admitted. "But after saving every dime from my job as a gas station attendant for the last two years, I was able to pull together enough to buy a couple of used cameras, some rinky-dink lighting equipment and barely enough film to do this project. Plus, my dad gave me his old generator and donated a few bucks to the cause. So, I've got just about everything I need."

"So what's missing?" she asked. "It sounds to me like you've got it all covered."

Eddie pointed to their empty glasses, signaling to the waitress for refills. He felt like saying *Having a chick like you as my girlfriend*. But instead he just straightened up and smiled confidently. "So, Christine Ray. What do you want to do with your life?"

Christine laughed. She wasn't used to being addressed by her full

name. "Me? That's a good question." After a thoughtful moment she looked him straight in the eyes. "I really like journalism. I'm working on the Bee Sheet again next year as the senior editor and I'll probably apply to college and try to get into a journalism program. I want to be a news reporter. I thought that working on this documentary would be a good experience for me." She gave him a wink. "And after meeting you, I know it will be."

Eddie was flattered. He raked a hand through his longish bangs. "That sounds like a pretty good plan. I'm sure you'll do well." He laughed and asked, "Do a little Barbara Walters for me? Would you?"

Christine played along and imitated the popular broadcast anchor. "So Eddie. Tell me what it was like in the early days before you became a famous Hollywood director. Were you a happy teenager? The world wants to know."

Eddie stared back at Christine. She was so hot and had a really rad personality. He felt as if he could cut loose and just be himself around her. "Well, Barbara. It wasn't always easy back then," he joked. "All the girls in Haddonfield thought I was a dork and I couldn't get no satisfaction if you know what I mean. But that's all changed now. My Malibu mansion is crawling with buxom babes."

Christine broke up in laughter and she gave him a little slug on the shoulder. "Eddie! You dog! You can't say things like that on TV!"

Startled by the physical contact, Eddie gave a nervous little laugh. "I can say whatever I want. I'm the director. Remember?"

Christine took a drink of her soda. "I am so glad we met... again, Eddie. I already feel so comfortable with you. Has that ever happened to you? You know, feeling that way around a stranger?"

"It just did," he said. "And you'll never know just how strange I am."

"Oh please!" she giggled, pointing at his T-shirt again. "Your clothing gives it away!"

"Hey now! You said you liked it a minute ago," Eddie said, pretending to be hurt.

"I do," Christine assured him. "You're one of a kind." She stopped talking and stared closely at his face. "Did anyone ever tell you that you look like a young David Duchovny?"

Eddie pulled out his wallet and flashed his driver's license at her. "FBI! I'm here to investigate!" he laughed. "Yeah. I've heard that before."

"You're pretty funny. How come you never talked to me at school?" she asked.

"How come you never talked to me?" he replied.

Christine thought about it for a minute. "I don't know. But I wish I had. We could have hung out this summer."

Eddie pictured Christine sitting in his bedroom watching sci-fi flicks

with him instead of Maggie. He certainly wouldn't have turned down the kiss the other night if it had been Christine who was coming on to him.

"Oh well," Eddie said. "We've still got a few more weeks of vacation left."

An almost shy smile lit up Christine's face. "Okay," she agreed. "Let's hang out a little." She leaned across the table with an adventurous gleam in her green eyes. "Fill me in on the Smith Grove Mental Hospital. Why are we going there? What's the story?"

Eddie wanted to kiss her frosty pink lips right there. He sat back in the booth instead and forced himself to focus on the project. "They closed the hospital down about ten years ago. They say it was because of government budget cuts, but that's not what really happened there. It was literally a chamber of horrors and the state had to close the doors for sickening human rights violations. They used to torture and neglect the patients. There was this one doctor in particular. Dr. Ernest Blackwell, head of psychiatry..."

Christine sucked in her breath. "The Ghost of the De ranged Psychiatrist! Of course!" She exhaled.

"You've heard about him?" Eddie asked.

"Oh yeah! Hasn't everybody?" Christine said. "I read a story about it somewhere. But I never realized that it was at the Smith Grove Mental Hospital. That's practically right in our own backyard!"

"I know," Eddie said. "And no one has ever captured his image on film before. There have only been eyewitnesses. We're going to be the first."

Christine shivered. "Wow. This is going to be exciting. Scary, but exciting."

Eddie nodded his head. "That's why I saved it for last. I wanted to get a little experience under my belt before I tackled this one. They say his spirit is so powerful that he can throw objects and break windows. We're going to have to be careful."

"I'll say! So how did he die? The psychiatrist?" Christine asked.

Eddie shrugged his shoulders. "No one really knows for sure. He disappeared about fifteen years ago after the state took away his license to practice psychiatry. They blamed him for turning patients into vicious, bloodthirsty animals with his cruel, experimental therapy. And after the Michael Myers incident... well, his fate was pretty much sealed. They say he went mad..."

"Michael Myers!" Christine squeaked. "You mean...?"

Everyone in Haddonfield knew about Michael Myers. He'd killed so many teenagers in the last fifteen years the cemetery had had to expand its grounds to make room for all of the young bodies. And he'd always killed on Halloween.

They'd never caught him. He was still out there... somewhere.

He'd put Haddonfield on the map.

"Michael Myers wasn't actually one of Dr. Blackwell's regular patients, but word has it that he got his hands on Myers for a few of his experimental therapy treatment sessions," Eddie informed her. "Dr. Blackwell was part of the psychiatric team that treated him before Michael Myers's infamous escape and massacre back in the seventies. Some people say that Dr. Blackwell was to blame. Yep. Michael Myers was a patient at Smith Grove for over fifteen years."

Christine blinked her eyes. "My god! I never knew about all this."

"Not many people do," Eddie stated. "I had to turn over some pretty big stones to find out the truth. The state is still trying to cover it up. They don't want their dirty laundry hanging out in the breeze if you know what I mean. But the truth is written in the autopsies. Dr. Blackwell apparently shocked several patients to death."

Christine was silent as she stared blankly at Eddie's face. "I don't know if this is such a good idea, Eddie. I mean, Michael Myers is still out there." She gulped. "They never captured him after... the murders that happened the last two Halloweens."

"Trust me," Eddie said. "Smith Grove Mental Hospital is the last place on the face of the earth Michael Myers would go. Think about it. If you were confined to a loony bin for the better part of your life, would you go back there after you'd finally escaped?"

Christine smiled glumly. "Of course I wouldn't... It's not that. It's been less than a year since the last murders and..."

Eddie looked into her frightened eyes. He had a feeling that she knew some of the kids from school who were murdered last year. "Were you close to any of them? The victims?"

Christine took a deep breath. "Sort of. I mean I kind of knew Kimmy Harrison and Shannon Geary from school. We weren't really good friends or anything, but I went to the funerals." Christine forced herself to smile. "I wrote the 'Good-bye, Friends' story for the school newspaper and talked to their parents and close buddies. By the time I was finished, I felt as if I knew them really well, you know?" Christine closed her eyes. "They were only a year older than us. Did you know them?"

Eddie shook his head. "Not really. Just from around campus. But I read your story. In fact, I saved it. It was one of the most powerful and touching articles I'd ever read. You're really a talented writer."

Christine beamed. "Really? You saved it?"

"Really," he answered sincerely. "I'll show it to you sometime if you don't believe me."

Christine winked. "I believe you." She took a deep breath. "Look, Eddie, sorry if I got a little emotional on you."

"It's all right. So are we still on for Saturday night?" he asked hopefully.

Christine decided to be brave and go for it. "Yeah. I want to go more than anything. But what will you have me doing? I don't know the first thing about filmmaking."

Eddie scribbled something on his clipboard and smiled at Christine. "For your information, there's just been a new position added to my list that I must fill immediately."

Christine cocked her head curiously. "What? What is it?"

Eddie knew that it was going to take some serious persuasion to get a girl like Christine to agree to come along on the overnight shoot. Just the idea of having her by his side in the dark, isolated building all night was almost more excitement than he could bear. He set down the clipboard and grinned, hoping that his newly added position would close her on coming. "I want you to be the onscreen narrator for this part of the documentary."

"Are you serious? You mean like being a field reporter? On camera?" Christine gushed.

"Exactly!" Eddie exclaimed. "You're perfect for the part and it would be a great addition to your résumé when you apply to a journalism program. Besides, you do a mean Barbara Walters impression."

Christine was breathless. "Oh, Eddie! This is a dream come true. Are you sure?"

"I wouldn't have it any other way," he told her confidently. "Don't worry. We can write the script together and then I'll direct you through the whole thing. It will be great," Eddie assured her. "You're a natural. And if we can sell the documentary, who knows! You could become famous."

Overwhelmed by happiness, Christine leaned across the table and gave Eddie a kiss on the cheek. "Oh! Thank you. You're the greatest!"

Eddie touched his face where she had just kissed him and felt the blood rushing to his ears. "Okay. So that's all settled," he said, composing himself. Eddie mumbled, "Now if I could only find a grip and a camera assistant, I'd be in hog heaven."

"Excuse me for sounding like a stupid idiot, but what's a grip?" Christine asked.

Eddie laughed. "A grip is a someone who lugs stuff around on the set. I need a big guy. He doesn't even have to be smart, just big." He casually slipped in, "Do you know anyone? Maybe one of your boyfriends?"

Christine wrinkled her nose. "I don't have a boyfriend and if I did, he wouldn't be a big dumb guy!" A great idea suddenly swept through her mind. "But, my best friend Julie has a boyfriend! Brandon McCormick! He's big and, I must admit, a little on the dim side. Maybe he could be

the grip and Julie could be the camera assistant! You'd really like them, Eddie. What do you think?"

Eddie pretended to consider it for a minute. "All right. That's fine with me. Do you think they'll want to do it, though?"

Christine smiled wickedly. "If I know Julie and Brandon, they'd die to go on this little excursion. I'll ask them tonight. In fact, I'm going straight to the lake from here to meet them. Do you want to come along?"

Eddie remembered that he'd invited his buddies Jason and Stanley over tonight to watch the movie *Blade Runner* and munch on popcorn. "I've already got plans. I'll just give you a call tomorrow and maybe we can meet up in the afternoon so I can give you a copy of the script."

"Great!" Christine told him. "There's just one small problem."

Disappointment washed across Eddie's features. "What? What's wrong?" he asked.

Christine sighed. "My parents. They'll never let me stay overnight at Smith Grove Mental Hospital. Not in a million years. They wouldn't understand."

Eddie smiled. "Don't worry. We'll figure something out by Saturday."

Christine stood up and extended her delicate hand. "You're right. I'll figure it out. Count me in. We'll talk tomorrow. Thanks again, Eddie."

Eddie shook her hand and noticed that her long nails were perfectly polished in pale violet, his favorite color. "Bye, Christine. Have a good night."

Maggie Grossman was fuming as she sat in her red compact car, which she'd cleverly parked across the street from the diner. She'd watched the whole "meeting" through the window. She'd seen how Christine had come on to Eddie and it really made her angry. Her temples were pulsing with fury. She was going to be extra upset with them if she got a migraine headache over this.

Maggie ducked down when Christine Ray walked out into the parking lot. "That little slut," Maggie mumbled viciously from beneath the steering wheel. She peeked out and watched Christine's slim, tanned legs moving toward her car. "Just look at that tight minidress she's wearing!"

Poor Eddie is so stupid and naive!

Maggie banged her fist against the dashboard. *She's using him... and he's letting her. I'll fix her*, she thought revengefully.

No one's going to take Eddie away from me. No one!

CHAPTER

3

Christine drove down the winding road toward the lake. She parked her mom's car and walked toward the twinkling lights of the lakeside shops and cafés. The lake was incredibly crowded tonight, jammed with loud, screaming teenagers and families who were out to enjoy the relaxing summer evening. It made her wish that she had a boyfriend of her own to share this beautiful night with. She wondered if Eddie was seeing anyone and why she'd never noticed him before. She felt as if she'd discovered a diamond in the rough.

Christine walked through the doors of Cyberspace, the local arcade. She covered her ears as she walked through the loud, spacious room blaring with computer game noises and an occasional *ping* from the archaic pinball machines.

Christine laughed to herself when she spotted Julie and Brandon by the miniature basketball hoop in the corner. Julie's long, curly black hair was piled on top of her head and she was leaning against the wall with her hands placed on her narrow hips. Her pretty, delicate features were set in a bored expression as she stood there in a faded pair of cutoff overalls. Julie rolled her eyes as her supercute boyfriend Brandon screamed out, "Yes! He scores!" when he finally put the ball through the hoop. He flashed a crooked smile at Julie, who covered her mouth as she yawned.

Brandon saw that Julie was not amused and he threw the ball toward the basket one last time. His crisp white T-shirt and white shorts contrasted attractively against his golden skin in the dimly lit arcade. A handsome smile flashed across his face and he embraced her in a suffocating bear hug. She laughed at his silly display of affection.

Julie ran her hands through Brandon's perfect brown flattop and he grinned, showing off his set of straight teeth.

Christine made her way through clusters of kids to reach the far corner of the arcade. By the time she got to Julie and Brandon, they were embracing each other in a passionate kiss, looking like something out of a scene from a cheesy cologne commercial.

"Break it up, you two!" Christine yelled jokingly.

Julie whirled around and then laughed when she saw that it was her best friend. "Christine! I thought you were going to throw us out of here or something!"

"I've got great news, you guys," Christine informed them.

Brandon nodded and laughed. "What? You finally got a life?"

"You're the one without a life," Julie joked, playfully nudging her elbow into his ribs.

Christine ignored Brandon's lame teasing. "Come on," she said,

pulling Julie's hand. "Let's get out of this geek pit and go to the ice cream parlor. I'll tell you about it there."

Christine turned to look at Brandon, a die-hard video game junkie who was eyeing the new Mario Brothers' game while fishing for quarters in his pocket. "You'll be very interested in what I've got to say," she told him.

"That'd be a first!" he teased as the girls dragged him outside.

"Shut up, Brandon!" the girls said in unison.

The three of them sat down with their ice cream cones at a little iron table outside Swenson's. Julie licked her double scoop of bing cherry ice cream. "So. What's the great news, girlfriend?" she asked.

Christine smiled brightly. "You are looking at the narrator of a film documentary!"

"What? Are you serious?" Julie asked, nearly dropping her cone. "Fill us in!"

Christine excitedly grabbed Julie's hand and squeezed it tightly. "I just came from a meeting with the director and he wants me to be the onscreen narrator. It's a documentary on haunted places. I'm going to introduce the segment at the abandoned Smith Grove Mental Hospital where the Ghost of the Deranged Psychiatrist lurks the corridors. We're filming Saturday night."

Julie squealed, "Oh my god, Chris! I am so happy for you! Wow!"

"Yeah!" Christine said. "I'm totally stoked. And guess what?"

"What?" Julie joked, "You're going to promise to write us when you're a famous reporter in Los Angeles?"

"Yeah, right," Christine said. "No. You guys are coming with me!"

Brandon shifted uneasily in his chair. "Hey, wait a minute, Christine. We're happy for you and all, but spending one of my last, precious weekends at some abandoned loony bin doesn't exactly turn me on. You know what I mean?"

Julie shot Christine a helpless glance. "I don't know, Chris..." She said, trying to talk her way out of it. "It's your gig and we wouldn't want to be in the way."

Christine butted in. "No, you guys. You wouldn't be in the way. You'll be helping. It's kind of a small production and we could really use a few extra hands."

"What's with all this 'we' stuff? And who's this director?" Brandon asked suspiciously. "I don't know of any directors around here."

"Eddie Baker," Christine said proudly. "He goes to Haddonfield High. He's been working on this documentary all summer long. He's a really cool guy. In fact, he's brilliant."

"Ooooooh," Julie taunted. "So, you met a guy, huh? Eddie Baker? I think I remember him." She whispered, "How long has this secret affair been going on?"

"It's not like that," Christine said defensively, although the idea of dating Eddie didn't sound half-bad. "We just met today and really hit it off. He's going to sell the documentary when it's complete."

"Whoopee," Brandon said flatly. "How exciting."

Christine remarked, "Well, at least he's accomplished something."

Brandon winced. "Thanks, but no thanks. It sounds like a guaranteed bore fest to me."

Christine smiled knowingly. "Did I mention that the trip will be an *unsupervised* overnighter?"

Brandon calculated the many possibilities in his mind and licked his lips. "As in no adults?" he asked with sudden interest.

"You've got it!" Christine laughed. She looked at Julie, whose eyes were dancing with excitement. "Well? What do you think?"

Julie looked at Brandon and then back to Christine. "So what would we have to do?" she asked. "There's got to be a catch."

"No catch," Christine told her. "You guys will be helping us move stuff around and helping with the cameras. No big deal. Eddie's just a little short on crew members. That's all." She lowered her voice and coaxed. "Come on. It'll be the most exciting thing any of us have ever done. We're going there to try to capture a real ghost on film."

"I don't believe in ghosts," Brandon stated in the most macho tone he could muster up. "All that stuff is a bunch of bull."

"You don't have to believe in ghosts, dummy. All you have to do is be there to help us set up the equipment," Christine said.

Julie winked at Brandon, who was still contemplating what he should do. "It sounds like fun. Come on, Brandon. I want to go," she said.

Brandon smiled mischievously. "Maybe I could sneak some beer out of my dad's refrigerator in the garage."

"Yeah!" Julie squealed. "Party time!"

"And you can drink it after we're done working," Christine reminded them. The last thing she needed was for her friends to start drinking while they were trying to work. Eddie would never forgive her if something happened to the equipment. She wondered if maybe she shouldn't have invited them. Brandon liked to party a little too much for her taste.

"Okay," Brandon groaned. "Count us in."

"Great," Christine said halfheartedly. "But you have to promise to behave. Okay?"

Julie and Brandon looked at each other and burst into a fit of laughter. "Yes, Mommy," Brandon howled in a baby voice, "I'll be a very good widdle boy."

CHAPTER

4

On Friday afternoon Christine sat at the kitchen table with her mom. Mrs. Ray, a classic mom type, was reading the want ads in the paper and suddenly looked up at her daughter. "I've been thinking about taking a part-time job. What do you think about secretarial work, honey?" she asked.

Christine swallowed the last bite of her ham-and-cheese sandwich. "I don't know. How come you're looking for a job?" she asked.

Mrs. Ray began clearing the dishes. "Well. You'll be leaving for college next summer and I guess I'm just looking for something to keep myself occupied. I thought it might be fun to go back to work again. It's been so long."

"I don't know, Mom," Christine said and nodded. "Secretarial work sounds so... boring. What about interior decorating?" She suggested. "You've done such a great job with the house."

Mrs. Ray looked around and smiled. "Thanks for the encouragement. That's not a bad idea. If I did that, I'd get to go shopping with other people's money."

Right," Christine said. "If you're going to work, you might as well enjoy what you're doing, and we all know how much you love shopping."

Mrs. Ray gave Christine a little hug. "You're right. That's a super idea, honey. I'll definitely think about it."

"Hey, Mom?" Christine asked. "Is it all right if I spend the night at Julie's house tomorrow? She invited me to go boating in the afternoon and then we're going to rent a movie or something," she lied.

Don't overdo it! she thought to herself.

"Sure, I don't see why not," Mrs. Ray said as she wiped the counter with a sponge. "As long as it's okay with Julie's mom."

Christine smiled guiltily. "Yeah, it's fine."

Mrs. Ray peered at her daughter over her glasses, picking up that something wasn't quite right. "Is everything okay, honey?" she asked.

Christine forced herself to smile. "Yeah. Never better." Christine stood up. "I've got to go now," she explained. "I'm meeting a friend this afternoon."

"Okay. Have a nice time."

Christine left the house feeling like some kind of a criminal. She hardly *ever* lied to her parents, but she'd decided to make an exception this one time. They would have never let her go on the trip if she had just asked them straight out. It had to be done.

Eddie was furiously trying to straighten up his bedroom office before Christine got there. He wanted to make a good impression. Meeting Christine was the best thing that had happened to him all summer and he didn't want her to think he was a slob. He wondered if he had a chance with her.

The doorbell rang just as he was stuffing his chess set under the bed. He quickly walked downstairs and opened the door.

Christine looked beautiful today in her bright pink tank top and a pair of Lycra bike shorts. Very athletic and healthy, he thought. And sexy.

"Hi, Eddie," she said.

Eddie smiled back and led her upstairs. "Hi. Come on up to my office," he joked.

Christine looked around at the movie posters that covered every inch of Eddie's bedroom wall. Most of them were from horror movies and foreign films that she'd never heard of. "Wow. That's some collection," she said, pointing at the walls.

"Yeah," Eddie said and grinned. "I'm a total film freak." He sat down at his tiny desk and turned on his computer. "You on-line?" he asked.

Christine timidly sat down on the edge of the bed. "No. I don't have a computer. I guess I'm pretty out of it, when it comes to stuff like that."

"Nah. You're not out of it," Eddie told her. "You can try mine sometime. I'll have you surfing the net like a pro in no time."

Christine smiled. "Okay. I'll take you up on that offer."

"Now," he said. "Let's get down to business, Miss Narrator. I've almost finished the script. Let me just get into word processing program here."

"How did you write the script already? I mean, we won't know what's going to happen until we get there," she said.

Eddie pulled up the document as he spoke. "I just wrote the introduction. It starts out with you introducing the segment in front of the hospital gates, then we'll move it inside and do another one and so on. I'll edit your clips in with the actual film of the ghost later. That is, if we can get him on film."

"Oh," Christine said. "I think I understand." She laughed. "How about, *This is Christine Ray outside at the abandoned Smith Grove Mental Hospital. Join us tonight as we hunt for the ghost of the deranged psychiatrist... if you dare.*"

Eddie whistled. "Not bad. Not bad at all. You're pretty good."

Christine giggled, "Thanks. I watch a lot of TV. What did you have in mind?"

"What you said sounds almost exactly like my opener," Eddie said. "Just your basic documentary intro."

"Hey," Christine said, remembering, "my friends Julie and Brandon are coming along to help."

"Excellent," Eddie said, scribbling something on his clipboard. "Thanks a lot. That takes care of our crew." He took off his glasses and looked at Christine. "Were you able to talk your folks into letting you go?" he asked hopefully.

Christine gave him a sly smile. "Sort of. I mean, they think I'm spending the night at Julie's house. Julie's going to tell her parents she's spending the night at my house."

"Ahh. The old *Can I stay at so-and-so's house* trick. Works like a charm... as long as you don't get caught." Eddie laughed.

"That would be the worst!" Christine cried. "I don't usually lie to them, but I couldn't figure out any other way to go."

"Parents..." Eddie sighed. "They just don't get it."

"Yeah," she agreed. "What about your parents? Do you have to sneak out or did they give you permission?"

"My parent," Eddie corrected. "I live with my dad. He's pretty cool. The old man lets me do whatever I want as long as I keep reminding him that all of this film stuff will pay off someday. He never really did much with his own life, so he lets me chase my dreams. He even pitched in a little cash to help me buy some of my equipment. You know?"

"What about your mom? Do you see her?" Christine asked.

"Not for years. She lives somewhere in California last I heard. She calls on the holidays and stuff, but we're not very close," he said sadly. "I'm going to find her when I move out there."

Christine nodded supportively.

Eddie and Christine both turned around when they heard the front door open downstairs. "Who is it?" Eddie called, praying that Maggie hadn't decided to stop by for one of her surprise visits.

A pair of light footsteps bounded up the staircase and a tall, gawky teenage boy wearing a pair of Dr. Spock ears beneath his short brown hair bounced into the room. "I-have-come-to-take-your-women-and-your-planet-Earthling!" he said and waved robotically to Eddie.

"Hey, Jason." Eddie exhaled, embarrassed by his friend's ridiculous getup. "Haven't you ever heard of knocking?"

Christine giggled at Jason and introduced herself. "Greetings from Earth. I'm Christine." She extended her hand.

Jason spun around and did a double-take. He ripped off the rubber ears and his face became a deep shade of crimson. He hadn't seen her, and hadn't expected a pretty girl to be hanging out in Eddie's room of all places. He stammered nervously, "Uh. Hi, Christine. Nice to meet you." Jason folded his arms and explained, "I was just fooling around... about taking the women and..."

Christine began laughing. "And I thought you were serious. Boy! Is that a relief! Especially since I haven't packed."

Jason smiled shyly. He would have never expected a girl like Christine to be so friendly.

Eddie groaned and turned back to the computer screen. "Okay, Christine," he said, hitting the print icon. "Here's your rough copy of the script. I still have a bit of polishing to do tonight, but this is a start."

Christine eagerly snatched the pages as they spit out of the printer. "Great. I'd better get going now. I've got to pack my bags."

Jason leaned his lanky frame over Eddie's shoulder and peeked at the screen. "Narrator, huh?" he asked. "For what?"

Eddie glared at him. "For the documentary, dork brain. Christine is going to be helping us."

"Won't that make the rest of the film out of sync? We I didn't have a narrator in the earlier segments," Jason mentioned.

Eddie wanted to strangle Jason's skinny neck right now. "It will be fine," he said in a warning tone of voice.

Christine sensed the tension that was building between the two boys. "Okay. I'll see you guys tomorrow after noon. I'm catching a ride up there with Julie and Brandon."

Eddie walked Christine downstairs. "Hey. Sorry about Jason," he apologized.

"Sorry for what?" Christine answered. "He seems like a pretty nice guy."

"Never mind," Eddie mumbled. "See you tomorrow."

The last rays of sun had slipped over the horizon and it was officially dark outside. Christine smiled and waved as she hopped on her bike and coasted down the driveway.

Eddie stomped back up to his room, where Jason was reading the script on the computer. "What the hell is wrong with you? Are you trying to make me look like a jerk in front of Christine?" he shouted.

"Ooooooh. Is our director making the move on his narrator?" Jason teased. "Well, I guess you'd have to offer a popular babe like Christine Ray the starring role to get her to—"

Eddie slammed the door shut. After all, he did add the narrator thing last minute as bait to entice Christine to come along. But he didn't want to admit that to Jason or anyone else. He'd just have to piece it all together somehow when he was editing it. Eddie covered himself by saying, "For your information, Christine is a very talented reporter and writer. Besides, this is *my* documentary and I'll hire whoever I want for whatever position I see fit! And if you don't like it you can just go—"

Jason shrank back and waved his hands. "Hey. Sorry, man. I was just fooling around. Relax."

Eddie calmed down a little bit. "I don't have time to relax and I'm not

in the mood for your jerking around. I've got a lot on my mind and about one million things to do before the shoot tomorrow."

Jason's Adam's apple slid down his throat as he swallowed. "I'm here to help you. Remember? What do you need me to do?"

Eddie patted Jason on the back and realized he was being too rough on his friend. "Sure you are. Why don't you give me a ride over to the rental truck place. We've got to get everything loaded up tonight."

"Sure thing," Jason said sincerely. "Let's go"

Christine rode down the slightly inclining road from Eddie's house and welcomed the warm breeze as it blew strands of hair off her face. She stopped at the main intersection and checked both ways for traffic. Seeing nothing, she pushed down on the pedals and moved across the street.

All of a sudden, a speeding car with its headlights off blared its horn at her from behind.

Oh my god!

Christine shrieked and swerved off onto the shoulder as the compact car rocketed past, missing her by just a few feet. She tumbled into the gravel on the side of the road.

"You jerk! You stupid, stupid jerk!" Christine screamed with her fists raised. Her heart was Pounding furiously from the close call.

The car hadn't even bothered to stop or slow down. It disappeared down the road before Christine could see what model or even what color it had been.

Christine grumbled to herself as she picked up her bike and the scattered script pages with shaking hands.

She carefully pedaled her bike down the long, isolated road, to the far right of the bike lane. She'd rolled up the script pages and tucked them in the waistband of her shorts so she wouldn't lose them.

Worn out from the strange encounter and the long ride, she stopped at the convenience store to get a bottle of water before she continued toward home. She propped her bike up against the curb and went inside.

As Christine was paying the clerk for her water, a horrible, metallic crunching sound followed by squealing tires came from outside.

On the street, only a pair of taillights were visible as a car flashed down the road. Christine looked down and screamed when she saw her broken bicycle crumpled up in the gutter.

"Oh no! Oh my god!" She inhaled as a heavy sinking feeling filled her

stomach.

Christine felt like crying and screaming all at the same time.

Had it been the same car that had nearly run her over earlier?

Christine held back the tears that were welling up in her eyes and picked the mangled, metal frame off the street. A shattered piece of reflector jingled as it hit the ground and a gush of air hissed out of the back tire.

Christine was about to call the police to report the incident, but then changed her mind. What if her mom got angry about the bike and wouldn't let her go out tomorrow night? She couldn't take any chances.

The broken, twisted bicycle was extremely hard to push down the curving road toward her house. She had to stop several times to catch her breath and muster up the strength to continue. Christine didn't have any enemies and couldn't imagine why someone would be so cruel and vicious.

This couldn't have been just an accident, she told herself.

The forest was alive with the chirping sounds of insects and frogs by the time Christine's house came into view. She could see the lights on in her modest, two-story home at the end of the road.

Suddenly, the same terrifying sound of the car horn blared from behind. Christine shrieked and whipped her head around.

At the top of the hill, half a mile behind her, she could make out the shape of a dark vehicle rolling slowly toward her. Its lights were off and it honked again.

It was following her!

"Oh my god!" She gulped. Christine began running toward her house as fast as she could, dragging the broken bicycle behind her. In a panic, she looked over her shoulder again. The car had come to a stop. It blared its horn one last time and made a U-turn.

It seemed like some kind of warning!

But who? Why? she wondered fearfully.

Christine hid her broken bicycle in the side yard by her house. She'd worry about repairing it later. Right now, she just needed to chill out and get ready for the trip tomorrow. She fixed herself a cup of herbal tea and went upstairs to study the script and pick out her wardrobe.

CHAPTER

5

On Saturday morning Christine was up in her room applying some kiwi-scented lotion to her bare legs. She threw on a pair of jean shorts, a black midriff T-shirt and her tennis shoes so she'd be comfortable in the searing heat today.

She double-checked to make sure that she'd brought everything needed for the trip. Then she carefully zipped her small duffel bag, which contained her favorite red blazer and matching skirt, a pair of pantyhose, her good shoes, all of her makeup, a battery-operated curling iron and a pair of jeans and T-shirt in case it got cold tonight.

Christine heard Brandon's beat-up VW bug coming down the street, and she was not looking forward to riding forty miles in his vibrating little excuse for a car. She grabbed a blueberry muffin that her mom had baked this morning and dashed out the door.

Julie had to push really hard to jar open the passenger door of the silver bug. She finally got it open and helped Christine throw her stuff in the back. Julie tossed her curly dark hair over the shoulder of her brightly colored tie dyed tank and winked at Christine. "My parents fell for it. We are free!" she sang.

"Shhhhhh!" Christine hissed, looking at her house. "My mom might hear you."

Christine crammed her body into the backseat and Brandon pressed the gas pedal, which made the car lurch forward. He jammed it into gear and they took off down the road.

"Where's the seat belt?" Christine asked as she felt around on the ripped upholstery.

Brandon laughed. "I think it's in the trunk, along with the muffler, the door handle and the spare tire."

Christine sighed. "Great."

"At least it runs," Brandon said. He added, "And it's paid for."

"Barely," Julie joked. "Yuck. Something smells in here!" she said, sniffing around distastefully.

"That'd be the dead body," Brandon teased.

"Gross!" Christine snorted. "Have you ever heard of a *car wash*?"

Brandon checked his flattop in the rearview mirror and crossed his eyes at her. "Duh? You mean you can wash these things?"

He flipped on the radio, which blasted to life. Brandon turned up the volume of the hard rock station and banged his fists against the dashboard to the beat of the music.

"Can you make it any louder!" Christine yelled sarcastically.

After they had driven for about twenty minutes on the northbound highway, Christine pulled out a set of instructions on how to get to the Smith Grove Mental Hospital. She yelled over the blaring music, "It says to get off on the Sleepy Hollow exit and turn right. It's just a few more miles, I think."

Brandon looked out at the untamed forest surrounding either side of the highway. "Are you sure you guys want to do this? We could go up to my family's cabin instead. It's just a few miles away from here."

"No way!" Christine said. "We made a commitment. Besides, I wouldn't miss this for the world."

Brandon winked at Julie and whispered, "If it gets too boring, we'll just take off on our own."

"You guys!" Christine protested. "Come on. We need you."

Julie pointed. "There's the exit sign."

Christine handed the map to Brandon as they pulled off the highway. He made a series of turns onto little roads that ran along the forest floor.

The road dead-ended and Brandon stopped. They got out of the car. Brandon peered up at a towering tree. "Are you sure these directions are right?" he asked.

"Give me that," Julie said, snatching the map from his hands. "You were supposed to make a left back there. Men cannot follow directions. It's just a fact of life."

"No," he argued. "I went exactly the way it said."

"You're wrong," she insisted. "It says to turn right, then left..."

Christine stretched her legs, which had begun cramping in the tiny car and mentally tuned out their childish bickering. She turned around in a complete circle and stopped. Shivers ran down her spine. "Over there. Look!" she pointed.

Julie gasped. "You've got to be kidding!"

Down a buckled side road, the abandoned Smith Grove Mental Hospital could be seen beyond what seemed like miles of threatening wrought-iron gates. The massive gray, almost black, stone building eerily sat nestled among the dark shadows of the trees.

"It looks like the haunted house at Disneyland," Brandon said uneasily.

"Exactly!" Christine exclaimed. Excitement flashed in her eyes. "That's why we're here. It's majorly haunted."

Brandon reluctantly turned the car around and went back down the road to where they'd missed the turnoff.

Julie peered out her window, looking at the monstrous stone tower

before them. They drove along the broken road and crossed beneath a crumbling archway that read, "Sanitarium."

"This is really creepy," Julie whined.

The old building was definitely creepy, Christine thought. It was not romantic as she had envisioned it. The old place was threatening and morbid.

The rental truck and a few other cars were parked inside the open gates of the hospital, which had obviously been pried open.

Christine recognized Eddie's lanky friend, Jason, from his house yesterday. Jason handed a cardboard box to Randy Reynolds, the school's chess champion. Christine remembered covering the story and couldn't forget Randy's shock of wild red hair and pale freckled skin.

Stanley Gruber and Howard Smith hopped out of the back of the truck to see who had arrived. They extracted a rickety old generator from the back.

Brandon pulled to a stop. "We must be at the wrong place. I'm not registered for the annual geek convention," he snorted.

Christine whispered sharply as they got out of the car, "Will you be quiet, Brandon!"

Stanley Gruber peered over his thick glasses at the car that had just arrived full of good-looking and popular teens from Haddonfield High.

Brandon recognized Stanley or "Goob" from English class last semester, where the brain had always let him copy off his papers. He really owed him. "Hey, Goob!" Brandon called. "How's it going?"

Stanley smiled with his lips closed so the girls wouldn't notice his overbite as he walked over. "Hi, Brandon," he said. "What brings you here?"

"You know him?" Julie whispered.

Brandon extended his hand to Stanley. "Yeah. Goob and me were in the same English class last year."

"Goob and I," Stanley corrected automatically. Stanley turned to the girls and blinked nervously behind his glasses. "Actually, my real name is Stanley."

The girls nodded. Stanley turned around to look at Howard, whose massive, jiggling body was walking toward them, expecting an introduction. Howard's chubby cheeks were flushed and his too small T-shirt was soaked with sweat.

Howard smiled at the girls and extended his chunky, soft hand. "Hello. I'm Howard," he said in his high, childish voice.

Brandon wrapped his arms around Julie as if to flaunt his hot-looking girlfriend in front of the idolizing misfits. "This is Julie," he said for her, "and that's Christine." He pointed. "We're here to help you

guys on this thing."

"Really," Stanley said, astonished that he had something in common with a popular, good-looking guy like Brandon. "I didn't know you were interested in ghosts."

Brandon laughed. "I'm not. Ghosts suck. These two girls made me come."

"Oh," Stanley said. "Well, we'll see you around." He turned to Howard, who was still staring at the pretty girls like a love-starved puppy. "Come on, Howard. We've got work to do."

Howard smiled and followed Stanley back to the truck.

Just then a pimple-faced girl with greasy hair and a clipboard approached Christine, Julie and Brandon, who were standing by the car. She snapped, "This is a private film shoot. If you'll please leave now..."

Christine and Julie couldn't help but giggle at the girl's lame attitude. Christine ignored her and pulled her bag out of the backseat.

The girl rudely tapped Christine on the shoulder. "Excuuuuse me? Did you hear what I said? This is a private—"

Christine snapped, "Will you back off? We're supposed to be here."

The girl's sneer twisted into an artificial smile. "Oh. Well, that's different, I guess. I'm Maggie Grossman. Can I have your names please?"

Brandon joked, "What is this, Maggie Grossman? The United States Marine Corps?"

Maggie scowled. "I just need to write down everyone's name on my clipboard for Eddie," she said.

Christine decided to cooperate. "Christine, Julie and Brandon," she rattled off. "By the way, where is Eddie? I need to show him my wardrobe."

"Your what?" Maggie asked, unsure of what she'd just heard the slut say.

"W-A-R-D-R-O-B-E," Christine repeated, annoyed. "You know, like clothes? I need to make sure my outfit is okay for filming tonight."

Maggie's eyes practically popped out of her head. She laughed sarcastically. "I think you must be mistaken. This is a documentary. We're here to film ghosts. Not you and your wardrobe."

"Whatever," Christine spat. She turned to Julie and Brandon. "I'm going inside to find Eddie. I'll see you in a few."

Christine stalked away from Maggie, who reminded her of a pesky gnat.

Maggie chased behind her. "Hey, wait. Hey, Christine? I'm sorry about all that. I'm just kind of stressed out," she apologized woodenly.

Christine nodded. "No problem. It's cool."

"So, what's this about your wardrobe?" Maggie questioned. "Eddie

must have forgot to mention that part to me."

Christine stopped in front of a dried-up fountain before the massive front doors of the hospital. She looked curiously at a black crowbar that lay next to several splintered boards that had been pried off of the entrance. "I'm going to be the narrator for this segment. I think we're going to shoot my part as soon as it gets dark."

"Oh." Maggie inhaled sharply. "I see. Well, my Eddie is in there somewhere." She pointed. "But he's really busy right now. I don't think you should bother him."

"Your Eddie?" Christine asked.

Maggie giggled seductively to herself as if she were remembering something. "Didn't he tell you?" she asked as if Christine were a complete idiot. "We've been together for years."

Christine quickly hid her disappointment. "Oh. He never mentioned it to me." She looked at Maggie and smiled, wondering how a great guy like Eddie could possibly tolerate this girl's rotten personality. *Maybe she's just having a bad day*, Christine thought.

"Why don't I take you to a room upstairs so you can unpack your wardrobe?" Maggie asked in a sickly sweet voice.

"Okay," Christine said and sighed. She reluctantly followed Maggie through the door and felt guilty for trespassing in the old building. Maggie led her into the dusty main lobby and up a flight of stairs in the cold building. Christine reminded herself that she was going to be the narrator and this was her big break. She tried to relax and enjoy herself, but it was nearly impossible now that she knew Eddie was taken. She wondered if she'd subconsciously made the decision to come because of him.

At the top of the staircase, Christine spotted him and she felt her stomach flutter. Christine, who was usually very social and outgoing, suddenly felt tongue-tied and nervous. Eddie was positioning a camera in the narrow hallway. He looked very professional and serious wearing a khaki vest and a pair of faded jeans.

In fact, he looks totally hot, she thought.

"Eddie. Hi." Christine waved. The sound of her voice sounded hollow and high-pitched against the bare cement walls.

Eddie looked up and waved back, obviously more interested in his work than her arrival. "Hi, Christine. I'll catch up with you in a minute," he called casually.

"Yeah," Christine said. "Okay."

What did you expect? For him to rush over and hug you or something? Christine asked herself, feeling foolish.

Maggie pointed to a room. "In there. Put your stuff in there for now," she ordered coldly.

Christine felt as if Maggie were a nurse and she were being checked

into the hospital as a patient. She didn't like being told what to do. But she nodded and dropped her bag in the room instead of giving Maggie a piece of her mind.

She felt like a total jerk for thinking that she and Eddie might have gotten together this weekend. How was she to know that his girlfriend would be there? How was she to know that he had a girlfriend in the first place? The dimly lit, tiny hospital room did nothing to cheer her up any. This place was so awful.

As soon as Eddie was finished checking the light with a little meter, he entered the room where Maggie was supervising as Christine unpacked her bag. "Hi, girls."

Maggie smiled brightly at him. "I was just helping Christine get set up."

Yeah, right! Christine thought sarcastically. She smiled at Eddie. "Yeah. Maggie's been a real help."

Eddie turned to Maggie. "We're going to need those lanterns up here pretty soon. We're already losing the sunlight and it will be pitch black in here in a couple of hours."

Maggie scribbled a note on her clipboard and said, "Sure thing. I'll go get them right now."

"Thanks, Mag," he said and she disappeared down the hall. He sat down next to Christine. "Are you ready? Do you know your lines?" he asked.

"Yeah. I think so," Christine said, wondering why he was sitting so dangerously close to her when his girlfriend was just around the corner. "I'm a little nervous though."

"You'll be fine," he assured her. "You're a pro. Remember?"

Christine laughed. "We'll see."

Eddie stood up. "Hey. I've got to go downstairs to check out some more camera angles. Want to come along for the grand tour?"

Christine beamed. "Yeah. That sounds great."

Maggie ducked into the shadows as Eddie led Christine down the stairs. When she was certain that they were gone, she sneaked back into the room and closed the door.

Christine's duffel bag was lying on the cot. Maggie bit her lower lip and unzipped the nylon tote. She disgustedly held up Christine's size five suit and rifled through her makeup bag. Maggie unscrewed the cap of Christine's mascara and smeared it all over the freshly cleaned garments.

Still hungry for satisfaction, Maggie dumped an entire box of loose facial powder into the duffel bag and stuffed the suit back inside. "There," she whispered. "She'll be sorry now!" She zipped up the bag

and set it back on top of the cot.

Deep within the far wing of the abandoned hospital, a shadowed figure sat silently in the dusty, cold hallway, listening to the noise of young voices coming from above. Their clunking footsteps and excited chatter pounded painfully in his sensitive ears.

A guttural growl of rage rushed from his throat. He clutched a razor-sharp knife in his hand and waited for darkness to descend upon the building and the intruders.

CHAPTER

6

Eddie led Christine through the long corridors of the old hospital, which fittingly looked like something straight out of a nightmare. The peeling paint on the walls was barely visible as the last rays of sunlight shone in through the dirt-caked windows. Nearly every doorway was crudely boarded up and the faint smell of the decaying building filled the air.

Christine listened carefully as Eddie briefly went over his plan for her segment, which they were going to shoot first.

The electric feeling that had overcome Christine was a mixture of excitement and uneasiness. The hospital actually felt haunted and threatening, as if some evil presence were watching their every move. And it was so cold inside, even on this hot afternoon.

Christine shivered as she timidly followed Eddie down another cold hallway, where he had a video camera set up on a tripod.

"I'm trying to cover all angles of the hospital," he explained. "I'd hate to miss any action and have to come back here again."

Christine watched while Eddie adjusted the camera on its mount. "This is a huge place," she commented. She lowered her voice to a whisper. "Where do you think the ghost will most likely show up?"

Eddie pointed the camera lens at her. "I don't know. It's hard to say. But I'm trying to cover the major corridors with my two cameras. Then I'm going to assign teams to stake out the different wings. They're going to be in constant contact by walkie-talkies and are to report any sightings. I'll be carrying a handheld camera with me at all times."

"Oh," Christine said. "Sounds like a good plan."

"Let's hope so," Eddie laughed nervously. He stared at Christine through his glasses for a moment. "I'm glad you're here, Christine."

Christine felt her pulse quicken. "I'm glad to be here," she said, trying to decode what he meant. Was he glad that she was here to work on the project or was he glad to see her in the same way she'd been glad to see him? Before Maggie came along, that is. She'd almost asked him about Maggie. Were they really a couple?

Before she had a chance to say anything, the walkie-talkie on Eddie's waistband crackled to life. "Eddie. This is Stanley. Where do you want us to set up the generator?" the voice said.

Eddie answered, speaking into his radio. "In the main lobby. Get everyone together for me. I want to have a crew meeting in about ten minutes."

Christine pushed against a door that was sealed shut.

"How come all the doors and windows are all boarded up?" she asked.

Eddie shrugged his shoulders. "Probably to keep out vandals, vagrants and film crews," he said and grinned.

"What's behind these doors?" Christine wondered aloud.

Eddie put the lens cap on the camera and pushed against a heavy door at the end of the hall. To the surprise of both of them, it swung open with a loud creaking sound. Eddie poked his head in and coughed from the dust. "Let's find out," he said mischievously.

Christine allowed Eddie to take her hand and lead her inside. His touch sent shivers down her back.

Inside the room, Eddie and Christine gawked at a crude table that was placed in the center of the room. Worn, leather straps with thick, metal buckles dangled over the edges. Christine's skin broke out in goose bumps as she backed away from the table, which was obviously designed to hold someone down against their will.

Accidentally, Christine bumped into the counter and a dusty case crashed to the floor. She sucked in her breath from the sudden noise. Eddie bent over and picked up the contents, which had clattered to the floor.

Christine stared down at the unusual apparatus as a sweeping feeling of uneasiness overtook her. "What is it?" she asked.

Eddie lifted back into the case a black box with a dial and several black cords and disks. "I don't know. It looks like some sort of an old radio or maybe an early model heart monitor. Pretty creepy stuff. We'll have to get a shot of this room later."

Christine had a gut feeling that they should leave this room. "Let's get out of here."

"Yeah," Eddie agreed.

Everyone had gathered in the lobby of the hospital. Howard and Jason were rummaging through the ice chest looking for something to drink. Maggie had lit several lanterns and the flickering light danced eerily across the high ceilings. Several faded oil paintings of serious-looking doctors hung high on the walls. Christine had to turn away from the creepy eyes of the pictures that seemed to be staring at them.

Brandon had been recruited by Stanley and was helping him fill the generator with gasoline. Julie watched Randy, who was making shadow puppets with his hands on the wall as she nibbled on some greasy potato chips.

The excited chatter died down when Eddie and Christine entered the room, as if the king and queen of the prom had just arrived.

Maggie slapped Howard's chubby hand as he grabbed a second soda out of the cooler. "Put that back," she hissed.

Howard made a face at Maggie and yanked his hand out of the ice.

Eddie stood in the center of the room and cleared his throat. "Thank you all for coming tonight. As you all know, we're here to capture the ghost of the deranged psychiatrist on film. It may be one of the most boring nights of your lives or it may be one of the most exciting. That depends on our subject's mood. Either way, we're a team and we need to work together to make this happen."

Maggie applauded enthusiastically until everyone else awkwardly joined in.

Eddie raised his hands to silence the forced clapping. "Okay now. In case any of you don't know the story, the deranged psychiatrist, or Dr. Blackwell, used to be the head of the psychiatric department here." Eddie held up an old newspaper article and pointed to the old picture of a dark, distinguished-looking man. He passed it around so everyone could get a good look. He continued, "Dr. Blackwell was remembered as a cruel, vicious man who tortured his patients in the name of science. In fact, before the state revoked his license, he killed several of them by way of electric shock and frontal lobotomies, according to the papers. He was also the personal doctor of serial killer Michael Myers."

The name Michael Myers sent a terrible sense of dread through each of the teenagers, who were all too familiar with the murders. Last Halloween several teens from school had been brutally massacred by Myers and four others had been butchered the year before at the big City Hall Halloween party, which ended when the massive building burned and crashed to the ground. The memorial plaques in the school library to the dead students and the burned-out shell of City Hall were constant reminders of the very real threat that Michael Myers posed to their young lives.

He preyed on teenagers.

And he was never caught.

Julie whispered shakily, "Christine! You didn't tell me that part! I can't believe we actually came here! This is too weird!"

Maggie laughed out loud as Christine's dark-haired friend, Julie, whined fearfully. She wasn't afraid of ghosts or of Michael Myers. But she was afraid of Christine. The perky blond bimbo posed a real threat to her. Her and Eddie.

Maggie spoke up, determined to drive the pretty girls away by scaring them. "The bogeyman never dies. They say that Michael Myers comes here after he kills. This place is the only home he ever knew. In fact, he might even be here right now, watching us and—"

Eddie cut her off. "Maggie! That is not true. Stop trying to scare everyone!" Eddie gave her a sharp look and faced the nervous eyes of the group. "There has never been such a documented report, you guys, so just relax."

Maggie threw her hands up in the air. "Well, duh! If it had been

documented then the authorities would have caught him by now! Right?" she stated victoriously as she watched Julie clutching onto Brandon's arm.

"Maggie! That's it with the stupid stories. We have some serious work to do," Eddie growled through clenched teeth.

Jason cleared his throat and spoke up. "That's right, you guys," he said, trying to calm down the nervous whispers that were bouncing off the walls. "Michael Myers has never been spotted here. It's the ghost of the deranged psychiatrist we need to worry about. I've heard that he sometimes throws things and breaks windows and stuff. Right, Eddie?"

Even though Jason was only trying to help, his words only made things worse. Eddie waved his arms to get their attention. "Guys! Come on. Get a grip on yourselves!"

Randy blinked and nervously stroked his shortly cropped orange hair. "Is it true, Eddie? About the ghost breaking stuff?" he asked in a hushed whisper.

Eddie sighed. "There's been a few isolated reports of paranormal activity with this particular subject. Yes." Eddie continued over the uprising of voices, "But none of it has been officially documented. That's why we're here. Remember?"

They all nodded, remembering that they were on a ghost hunt after all.

Christine spoke up. "If we stay in communication with each other and work together, we'll be just fine. Remember, there's nine of us and only one of him. We have bodies. He doesn't."

A trickle of laughter tinkled across the room and Eddie smiled at Christine for injecting a little humor into the situation.

Brandon raised his hand and asked sarcastically, "So what are we supposed to do if this ghost attacks us or something?" A few of the boys giggled nervously.

Eddie sighed, aware that Brandon was just along for the ride. "You'll all have walkie-talkies. If you encounter anything unusual, report it over the radio," he answered flatly.

"But what if the ghost takes my radio and I can't call for help?" he teased.

Julie gave Brandon a warning look and Eddie ignored the comment meant to annoy him. "Any real questions?" he asked.

Brandon finally decided to shut up.

Howard timidly spoke up. "Yeah. Where's the bathroom? I've had to go since before I got here."

The teens broke up into laughter as Eddie pointed down the hall. He picked up his clipboard. "I've assigned everyone duties for the first segment we're filming with Christine. Then later, we'll be splitting up into teams of two in various lookout positions all over the hospital.

Come up and get your sheets."

Maggie was the first in line to find out what her duties would be. "Script supervisor/gopher?" she said and pouted. "What's that supposed to mean?"

Jason was standing behind her. He teased, "Gopher. You know. Like go-for the coffee, Maggie, or go-for a walk, Maggie."

Eddie sighed. "You'll be making sure that our narrator reads the correct lines, and in between shooting, I'll need you to get things for me."

Maggie glared at him. "I don't want to do that. Why don't you get someone else?"

Eddie placed his arm around her shoulder. "Maggie. With your attention to detail, you're the only person capable of doing the job right."

Maggie's unhappy expression melted as she soaked in every word of Eddie's compliment. "Oh. Well since you put it that way. Okay."

Julie nudged Christine and pointed to Eddie, who had his arm around Maggie. "Looks like your guy prospect already has a girlfriend."

Christine lowered her eyes. "I know. Bummer, huh?"

"Big time," Julie agreed. She smiled at her friend. "There's only one thing to do in a situation like this," she declared.

"What?" Christine asked, wondering what Julie was up to.

Julie winked. "We'll go upstairs and make you look gorgeous."

Brandon was still lazily sitting on a bench after everyone had received their assignment sheets. Eddie walked over to him. "You're going to be the grip, Brandon. I need a strong guy to help move the cords and lights and stuff," he told him

Brandon looked away. "Why do I have to do all the grunt work?"

Eddie was patient even though they were running way behind schedule. He knew that even one disgruntled crew member could cause havoc on the set. "Because that's why you came here. Isn't it?"

Brandon just sat there with a blank expression on his face. Eddie sat down next to him. "Hey, buddy. What's the problem?" he asked.

Brandon couldn't possibly reveal the fact that he was getting scared in the creepy old place. He wished he hadn't come here. He stood up and snatched his assignment sheet from Eddie. "There's no problem, man."

Eddie patted him on the back. "All right then. Let's do it." He whispered, "You know, if we pull this off and actually capture something on film, we'll all be recognized as real filmmakers. This could be a great career for you, Brandon."

Brandon jumped in surprise as Jason cranked on the old generator

and it rattled to life. Eddie suddenly figured out that Brandon, despite his tough, macho exterior, was very afraid. Eddie lowered his voice and placed a hand on Brandon's shoulder. "Brandon. I know it's a weird, creepy atmosphere and you'd probably rather be kicking back with your girlfriend tonight, but we need you. We really need your help."

Brandon shook Eddie's hand off his shoulder and grinned. "Okay already. So where should I go?"

A glance revealed that Brandon was still nervous and uneasy about the whole thing.

Eddie pointed to Howard and Stanley, who were struggling to lift an equipment case off the ground. "How about there for a start. Looks like they could use a little muscle. We've got to shoot Christine next in an exterior shot in front of the asylum."

The dark figure crept silently through the shadows of the unlit corridor and slipped inside. He followed the voices of the teenagers and stopped against the wall. Through the two little holes, he could see them.

He could smell them.

He could almost hear their blood pumping through the veins of their young bodies.

CHAPTER

7

Christine carried a lantern in her hand and led Julie to the room upstairs where she'd left her bag earlier. They only had thirty minutes to get her dressed and ready to shoot her segment.

Julie asked, "So what are you going to wear, Chris?"

Christine smiled confidently and unzipped her duffel bag. "Voilà!" she chirped as she pulled the suit out of the bag and held it up in front of her body.

Julie's face went white as she stared at the suit. "Chris!" She gulped. "I hate to break the news to you. But your threads are totally trashed!"

Christine looked down at the greasy black-and-white smudges on her favorite red suit and gasped. "Oh no! It's ruined!" Tears welled up in her eyes. "My makeup bag must have spilled! What am I going to do!"

Julie took the suit from Christine and held it under the light of the lantern. "What is this! Mascara? Ew. And powder? I don't think we can save it."

Christine threw her hands up in the air. "Now what?" She sniffed. "I don't have anything to wear! I can't go out there in shorts!"

Julie pointed to her own overstuffed suitcase in the corner. "Lucky for you I'm an obsessive overpacker. I might have a little something in there."

Christine wiped a tear off her cheek. "Really?" she squeaked hopelessly.

Julie pulled a short black dress made of stretchy cotton out of her bag and smiled. "I brought it along in case Brandon and I got the chance to sneak off later. You know, to turn him on." She grinned and held it up before Christine. "I know it's not a professional-looking suit, but it might look all right with your black shoes and a pair of hose."

Christine gave Julie a tight hug. "You're the greatest! I'll take it!"

Julie closed the door as Christine peeled off her shorts and slid into the dress.

She spun around in the tight garment, which clung to her body. "Well? How does it look?" she asked Julie. "And be honest."

Julie smiled. "Honestly? It looks better on you than it does on me. It's very sexy. Maybe a little too sexy."

Christine looked down at the short hemline of the skirt, which revealed several inches of leg above her knees. "I know. I hope Eddie doesn't get mad at me. I told him I'd be wearing a suit."

"Get mad?" Julie coughed. "You'll be lucky if he doesn't faint when

he sees you!"

Julie sat Christine down on the cot and applied her makeup with a tiny lighted mirror she'd brought along. Christine practiced her lines as Julie styled her hair, sweeping it up off her neck and affixing it in place with little hairpins.

Julie sprayed Christine's alluring hairstyle with some hair spray and stood back to look at her work. "Very nice," she said.

Maggie Grossman savored every step down the hallway as she went to get Christine and her friend. She couldn't wait to see how bad the suit looked. So bad, she hoped, that they'd just have to cancel the stupid narrator thing.

Maggie's expression became puzzled when she heard the girls laughing behind the door. She knocked lightly.

They weren't supposed to be laughing!

Julie called, "Enter the beauty parlor."

Maggie opened the door and felt a rush of adrenaline pumping through her limbs when she saw Christine.

She looked... stunning in that revealing dress! *No!* she thought.

Maggie composed herself. "I just came to tell you we'll be ready for you in ten minutes."

"Thanks for the warning," Christine said, noticing that Maggie was staring at her. "Is something the matter?" she asked as she blotted her lipstick on a tissue.

Maggie pointed, her brows arched. "Is that what you're wearing?"

Christine sighed heavily. "Yeah. The clothes that I brought along got ruined in a major makeup spill."

"That's one of the many reasons I don't wear a drop of makeup." Maggie commented sharply. She glanced at her watch. "I'll see you guys in nine minutes." She slammed the door shut behind herself.

Julie swiped her own long black hair with a brush and giggled. "What's her problem?"

"I don't know," Christine replied. "I don't understand how Eddie puts up with Maggie. He's such a nice guy." She shrugged her shoulders. "It really bites."

"Yeah," Julie agreed. "Especially when he could be going out with someone nice, smart and pretty. Someone like you."

"She could *use* a little makeup," Julie joked.

"It's not about makeup. She could use a new personality. I mean, look at the Hunchback of Notre Dame. He had a great personality that made up for his gruesome looks," Christine said.

Julie howled, "Yeah. I can just see you going out on a date with old Quasimodo!" She imitated Christine, "No really, girls! He's a total babe

on the inside! He's so fine! That hunchback of mine!"

Christine had to laugh. "I didn't mean that I found him attractive, you geek!" She explained, "You know what I mean. I was just saying that looks aren't everything."

"They're not?" Julie teased as she fluffed her hair. "This is planet Earth, baby—where only the beautiful survive."

"Oh right. I forgot," Christine commented sarcastically.

Julie whispered, "Speaking of babes, Brandon and I are planning to find ourselves a private room later on if you know what I mean."

Christine hesitated for a moment with a look of concern on her face. "I don't know if that's such a good idea." She glanced around, feeling as if someone were watching them. "This place is so dark and... well, abandoned. We should all stick together tonight to be safe."

"Get real!" Julie snorted. "I can just see it now—me, Brandon and four dorky guys! Besides, Eddie told me that Brandon and I are going to be a team for the stakeout later. We've been assigned to keep watch in the east wing."

"Really? I wonder who he assigned me with?" Christine wondered aloud. "I'm sure he'll be teamed up with his girlfriend."

Julie looked at her watch. "Ooh. We'd better get down there. It's time for your big scene."

"You're right. Do I look okay?" Christine asked.

Julie rolled her eyes. Christine always looked great. "You look fabulous, darling! Break a leg!"

A dark figure ducked down into the shadows of the forest and stared up at the building. The figure moved quietly among the trees. His eyes were locked upon the young girls silhouetted in the window.

Christine felt self-conscious as she made her grand entrance down the staircase to the lobby. She could feel the silent catcalls firing at her from the eyes of the boys downstairs.

Eddie sucked in his breath as Christine walked across the room, lighting up its dusty gray walls. His stomach fluttered as he soaked up the beautiful vision before him.

Christine shyly looked at her dress and then slowly lifted her eyes to meet Eddie's. "Is this okay?" she asked softly.

Eddie's throat was tight and dry. "Wow!" he gasped uncontrollably.

Christine laughed at his stunned expression. "Maybe I should try to find something else to wear," she suggested.

"No," he said quickly, averting his gaze from her long legs. "You look

great. It's a very nice dress."

"I'm glad you like it," she said, relieved that he didn't want her to put on something else. Mainly because she didn't have anything else that wasn't trashed.

Maggie could nearly feel steam shooting out of her ears. She pushed her way between Christine and Eddie and rolled her eyes at Christine. "Eddie. We'd better get started. It's getting late," she reminded him.

Eddie grinned at Christine. "Come on. It's time."

Stanley and Randy rolled the old generator outside and hooked up the cords to the lights, which came to life. The exterior of the old hospital looked extremely creepy and threatening in the dark with the lights casting an eerie glow across the old Victorian-style building.

Julie cowered close to Brandon as he adjusted a light to shine directly toward Christine. Julie peered out into the endless black forest, full of distorted shapes that she knew were only trees. Her eyes strained in the darkness to see what was out there. Something was making her feel uneasy. She felt as if someone or something were watching them.

When everything was set up and Christine was in position, Eddie called, "Action!"

Christine stood beneath the archway and recited her lines directly into the camera. "Welcome to the abandoned Smith Grove Mental Hospital. I'm your narrator, Christine Ray. Join us tonight as we search for the ghost of the deranged psychiatrist who lurks the dusty corridors here, looking for new victims... if you dare!"

"Cut!" Eddie shouted. "That's a keeper. Let's move it into the lobby now."

Maggie waved her arms hysterically. "No! No! That was all wrong!" she protested. Eddie stared at her as she explained. "The script says, 'looking for new patients'! Not victims!"

Christine sighed, feeling foolish. "She's right. I said it wrong."

Eddie laughed. "It was fine. The word 'victim' sounds better than 'patient.' Especially due to the circumstances. Let's move it inside, everyone." He met Christine and walked with her toward the doors. "That was great. Really great," he said.

Christine smiled. "Thanks."

"I'm going to have you walk down the stairs as you deliver the rest of your lines. It will add effect to the piece." Eddie admitted, "You looked so totally hot—I mean, great when you entered the room like that earlier. I need to capture it on film."

Christine blushed as she looked beyond Eddie's glasses and into his eyes, which were glittering with excitement.

Is he attracted to me? she wondered.

As they packed up the lights and began moving things inside, Julie looked back again, into the forest. Still just motionless trees out there.

And then she saw something move.

Julie whispered to Brandon, "I just saw something out there! In the woods."

Brandon glanced over his shoulder. "It's probably just an animal, Julie. This is the forest, you know. I'm sure there's a lot of moving things out there."

Julie laughed at her own paranoia and snuggled up to Brandon's chest. "You're right. It was probably just a deer or something."

Before they entered the building, Brandon peered around. He didn't like the idea of something being out there, hiding in the dark. But everything was still and quiet, so he went inside after the others.

A few minutes later they were all set up inside. Eddie waved to Christine and called, "Lights, camera, action!"

Christine slowly moved down the stairs. "We're inside the abandoned Smith Grove Mental Hospital for a wild night of ghost hunting. They say that Dr. Blackwell went mad after one of his patients, serial killer Michael Myers, escaped over fifteen years ago and murdered twenty teenagers. The doctor disappeared and the locals say he still haunts these very corridors, searching for his long lost patient. Will the ghost of Dr. Blackwell, otherwise known as the deranged psychiatrist, appear tonight? Stay tuned to find out."

"Cut!" Eddie yelled. "That's it. Great job, everyone."

Christine took a deep breath and Julie ran over and hugged her. "That was perfect, Chris! You were great!" she cried.

Even Maggie couldn't find anything wrong with Christine's performance. Every damn word had been perfectly delivered.

Eddie announced, "We're going to take a quick meal break and then we'll be splitting up into teams of two to stake out the corridors for the rest of the night."

Suddenly, the old building creaked with a deafening groan that startled everyone. Eddie raised the volume of his voice and spoke over the worried mumbling of the group. "It's okay. It's just the building settling. Nothing to worry about."

But everyone still looked worried.

CHAPTER

8

After everyone had stuffed themselves with hoagies and chips from the cooler in the lobby, Christine went upstairs to change back into the clothes she was wearing earlier.

It was really dark upstairs except for the little lanterns that were scattered about. Shadows danced across the dark, suffocating walls. Christine thought about how Eddie had complimented her. If he hadn't had a girlfriend, she'd have thought he was coming on to her.

In the little room, Christine peeled off the black dress and laid it out on the cot. Just as she was about to put on her T-shirt, she heard footsteps moving down the dark corridor outside.

Suddenly the door swung open and Christine jumped. She instinctively covered her half-naked body with the shirt. "Who's there!" she yelled angrily.

The door was now wide open and she couldn't see who was out there in the blackness. But she could feel a pair of eyes staring at her. "Who's there!" she screamed.

Her question was only answered by heavy, raspy breathing that could be heard just outside the open door. Chills ran down Christine's spine. "Close the door!" she demanded, staring into the darkness.

She saw a flash of shadowed movement and heard the heavy footsteps move away. Christine knew that whoever was out there had seen her undressed and that made her feel angry and violated. She slammed the door shut and finished getting dressed.

Christine walked downstairs shakily, determined to find out who had been up there spying on her. Everyone was sitting around in a circle on the floor eating the last of the food.

Christine whispered to Julie, "Did anyone just come downstairs?"

"Only you," Julie answered. "We all just finished eating. Why?"

"Someone was up there." Christine gulped. "Someone just opened the door while I was changing my clothes and they were staring at me! They saw me in my underwear!"

"Are you sure?" Julie asked. "But no one left. I'm pretty sure of it."

Eddie butted in after eavesdropping on their conversation. "Someone opened the door upstairs? Just now?" he asked, his eyes wide in surprise.

"Yeah," Christine said. Everyone was staring at her.

Eddie grabbed his handheld camera and pulled Christine up by the hand. "Come on! It must have been the ghost!" He looked at the rest of the crew, who were sitting there in astonishment. "Okay, everyone!" he commanded. "Split up into teams and take your assigned positions around the hospital. Make sure that your walkie talkies are on.

Howard, Jason, go hook up the generator to the mounted cameras and lights. Hurry!"

Eddie bounded up the stairs and Christine followed. "In there." She pointed. "That's where it happened." Eddie picked up the lantern and searched the small room, where he found nothing unusual. He entered the hallway and began pushing on the boarded-up doors. Still, he found nothing.

Eddie finally leaned against the wall and searched. Christine's face. "Are you sure you saw something?"

She corrected him. "I didn't see anything. But I heard footsteps and the door opened. I could hear someone breathing."

Eddie sighed heavily. "Maybe he'll come back later.

The thought made Christine shiver. "Yeah. Do you think it could have been the ghost?"

"It's the only logical explanation," Eddie stated. "Everyone except you was downstairs eating."

It didn't sound very logical to Christine, but there seemed to be no other explanation.

Christine sank down next to Eddie and he put his hand on her knee. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, thanks," she said, looking at his hand in surprise.

He removed it quickly. "Sorry. I didn't mean to touch you like that."

Christine secretly wished he *had* meant it. "So now what do we do?" she asked.

"We wait," Eddie said as he sat his camera on the ground. "We wait until the ghost comes back. Isn't making films fun?" he joked.

"Scary is more like it," she said. "But exciting. Are you always going to make ghost documentaries?"

"No." Eddie sighed. "I'm going to make movies. This is just a start. As soon as I sell this one or at least show it around, I'm going to try to get work with a studio in Los Angeles."

"What about college?" she asked. "Don't you have to go to film school or something before you can get a job?"

"Not from what I've read," Eddie said. "All of the great directors never went to film school. They just started making independent films until they got noticed. It's all about who you know anyway. So when I move to LA, I'll get out there and start meeting people and making connections."

Christine sighed. "It all sounds so far away. So Hollywood."

"It is far away," he told her. "But I'm catching the first plane out there after I graduate next year. I've got my mind made up."

Maggie suddenly appeared out of the darkness. The lantern light shone up in her face and looked like a scene out of a horror movie. "Did you get anything on film? Did you find Christine's Peeping Tom?" she

asked sarcastically.

Christine knew that Maggie had been standing there listening to them for some time, so the answer was obviously no.

"No," Eddie said. "But he'll be back. I can feel it."

Maggie sat down very close to Eddie and smiled insincerely at Christine. Eddie scooted over to put a little distance between them. "So what are you guys talking about?" she asked.

"Nothing much," Eddie said and yawned.

The silence was thick. No one knew what to say. It was obvious that Maggie was an unwanted third wheel.

"Hey, Mag?" Eddie finally asked. "Would you go get me a soda from the cooler downstairs?"

Maggie knew she was being brushed off, but she smiled at him anyway. "Sure. I'll be right back."

Eddie added, "Will you bring Christine something?" He turned to look at her, "What do you want?"

"Bottled water would be great," Christine said. "My lips are so dry."

"I'll bet they are," Maggie mumbled to herself as she disappeared down the hall.

"Sorry about Maggie. I think she's a little jealous of you," Eddie said.

"I guess she's got a right to be," Christine admitted, realizing that her comment might have come across the wrong way.

Eddie raised his eyebrows quizzically. "What's that supposed to mean?"

Christine explained, "Well, after all, she is your girlfriend and here you are sitting in the dark with a strange girl. I'd be upset too if I were her."

"Wait a minute," Eddie said in shock. "You thought that Maggie and I were... Who told you that?"

"Maggie of course," Christine informed him. "She said you two have been together for years."

Eddie grimaced distastefully. "No way! We've never been a couple. Just friends. We hang out all the time. She's like one of the guys. You must have misunderstood her."

Christine was beginning to see the truth. "No, she made it crystal clear." She winked at Eddie. "Well, she really likes you. That's for sure. No wonder she's been so rude to me all day."

Eddie laughed. "I'm going to have to have a little talk with Maggie later."

Christine was relieved to discover that Eddie was single after all. "So does this mean you're available?" she asked jokingly.

Eddie nodded enthusiastically. "Yes. Definitely yes! And you?"

Christine smiled shyly. "Well. That depends on who's asking."

"I'm asking," he said.

Christine crinkled her nose. "In that case. Yes."

Brandon slumped against the wall in the east wing of the old hospital and hummed to himself as Julie scoped out the dark hallway.

"Brandon!" Julie whispered. "Come here. Look what I found!"

Brandon lifted himself up from the chilly tile floor to see what his girlfriend was so excited about. "What?" he moaned.

Julie grabbed Brandon by the hand and led him into a tiny room that was just off to the side of the main hallway where they had been posted. She ran her hand along the wall of the room and giggled. "It's padded. We could have a lot of fun in here."

"Ooh. Yeah. You're right about that," he groaned pleurably. He peeked out into the hall to make sure no one was hanging around.

Julie giggled and wrapped her hands around his strong shoulders. She closed her eyes and gave him a long kiss.

Brandon closed the door and peeled off his shirt.

Stanley and Randy had been assigned roaming duty, which meant that they had to walk around the building to keep watch for anything unusual. The two boys ventured off into the east wing of the hospital, toward the padded cells.

Julie suddenly sat up and Brandon groaned. "What's the matter? Why'd you stop?"

"Shhhh," she hissed, placing a finger on his lips. "I think I hear someone coming!"

Julie wrapped her shirt around herself and peeked out into the dark hallway. "That's weird," she mumbled. "I could have sworn I heard something." She shrugged her bare shoulders and smiled at Brandon as she dropped the shirt to the floor. "Now, where were we?" she growled playfully.

Stanley and Randy stood frozen at the end of the hall.

Randy stammered, "D-did y-you see that?"

Stanley shook his head and fumbled for his walkie talkie. "A ghost!"

Stanley went around the corner and ducked into the stairwell. He spoke into his radio. "Eddie! Come in! We just spotted something at the end of the east wing! Hurry!"

Eddie and Christine jumped as the radio crackled to life.

Eddie grabbed his camera and pulled Christine by the hand. "Come on! They've got something down there!"

A wave of fear and excitement rushed through Christine as they ran downstairs and into the dark east wing. They found Stanley and Randy cowering at the top of the stairs.

Randy pointed a freckled hand at the doorway at the end of the hall. "D-down there. We just saw it."

Eddie turned on his camera and miniature light as he made his way down the hall toward the door. Christine's heart was pumping furiously. Eddie whispered, "One, two three!" and barged into the room.

Julie and Brandon screamed. Brandon jumped to his feet. "Aaaaaugh!" he shrieked, terrified by the surprise.

Eddie and Christine screamed, which made Stanley and Randy scream.

Julie angrily held her clothes against her body and yelled, "What the hell are you guys doing! Are you crazy!"

Brandon, clad only in his underwear shook a fist at Eddie, who quickly turned off the camera and went into the hallway. "What's the matter with you!" Brandon bellowed.

Julie and Brandon quickly got dressed and came into the hallway.

Eddie was angry now too. "What were you guys doing!"

"What do you think we were doing!" Julie snapped

Eddie blushed. "I know what you were doing, but you were supposed to be keeping watch. Not sneaking off and scaring all of us half to death!"

Brandon pushed his flushed face right into Eddie's. "We're out of here, man! I can't take this crap anymore!" He grabbed Julie by the hand. "We're leaving! Now."

Christine and Julie gave each other helpless glances and Brandon stomped down the hall.

Within minutes, Julie had grabbed her bag and she and Brandon burst out the front doors of the hospital.

"I have never been so humiliated in my whole life!" Julie sniffed.

"You're telling me!" Brandon yelled. "I think they did that on purpose just to sneak a peek at a little live action!"

Julie was about to say something in their defense because she knew that it was probably just a misunderstanding, but instead she stopped dead in her tracks and gasped at what she saw.

Brandon stopped too and his mouth hung open in shock. His heart pounded wildly.

The tires of his silver VW bug had been slashed and were nearly flat. All of them. The little car looked odd sitting so close to the ground.

"No! No!" Brandon screamed out of frustration.

Just as Brandon was about to blame someone inside, he noticed that all of the tires on all of the vehicles had been slashed to ribbons.

Julie stammered. "Oh my god! Look!" She was staring at the gates that surrounded the old building.

Someone had locked the gates shut with a thick chain.

They were trapped inside.

Julie pointed a shaky finger at the chained-up gates. "Oh my god!" Julie cried. "Who would do this!"

Brandon angrily kicked up a cloud of dust and cursed, looking at his car. "Damn it!"

Julie peered around into the forest and grabbed Brandon by the arm. "Come on. We've got to get inside."

Brandon knew that they had to get out of there. Someone was after them. He had to think fast. "Wait," he said. He opened the trunk of his car and removed a can of Fix-a-flat.

"Oh! Get real, Brandon!" Julie shrieked. "That's not going to even start to help the situation!"

Brandon snapped at Julie. Not because he was angry with her, but because he was very afraid. "Let me do it my way! I've got a spare in the back and if I can just fix the other front tire maybe we can get out of here!"

Julie sniffled. "But the gates are locked! Even if you get the tires fixed, we're still trapped in here!"

"You go try and open the gates and I'll fix the tires. Go!" he shouted.

Julie reluctantly walked over to the gates and began tugging on the heavy chain, which was secured with a padlock.

She peered out into the forest surrounding the property and tried not to think about the noise she'd heard earlier out there. But the shifting shadows wouldn't let her thoughts cease. Was someone out there watching them? She suddenly became aware that the night noises of chirping insects and croaking frogs had stopped. It was strangely and disturbingly silent. Something was wrong.

CHAPTER

9

Maggie mumbled to herself angrily and went downstairs to the soda cooler. She'd seen Brandon and Julie run outside a few minutes ago, but she didn't care. Maybe they'd leave and take their Barbie-doll friend with them. Maggie toyed with the idea of spitting in the drinks she'd been sent to get for Eddie and Christine.

"It figures Christine would want purified, bottled, freaking water!" she muttered through clenched teeth. "Like she should be afraid of calories!"

Maggie knew that Eddie was only interested in a girl like Christine for her perfect looks. Looks that Maggie would never have in a million years. She'd have to figure out a foolproof plan to get Eddie to hate Christine. Maybe she could make up a good lie to tell him about her or something.

Maggie extracted a cola and a bottle of water from the cooler and opened them. Just as she was about to spit in them, she heard a noise down the hall. Quickly, she put the cap back on the water in case one of the guys saw what she was up to.

Maggie listened for the noise, which had stopped. She sighed and walked back toward the stairs. One of the doors was open a crack. As Maggie reached out to close it, a filthy hand suddenly grabbed onto her wrist.

Maggie screamed and the drinks went flying out of her grasp. "What the..."

Maggie's terrified cries were muffled by a rough hand that clamped over her mouth. She bit down, but that only made the attacker's grip tighten. She couldn't breathe.

The figure spun her around and she gasped at the horrifying figure.

Patches of clumped, matted hair sprouted out of the thing's misshapen head and a pair of crazed eyes burned into her from behind a blood-spattered plastic mask. Its huge body was covered in a tattered, mud-caked jumpsuit that revealed bits of pasty, white skin with hideous scars.

Through her state of total shock, she realized that it was Michael Myers.

The bogeyman...

Maggie screamed and wavered unsteadily, her face pale with fear. Before she could struggle, Michael Myers threw her flailing body down onto a table and strapped her on. He stuffed a rag in her mouth so she couldn't make any more noise.

Maggie watched in horror as Michael Myers ripped open a black box on the counter. She winced as he extracted several cords and metal

lobes from the black box. He forced a rough, plastic band around her skull and left the room. Maggie tried to scream, but could only manage muffled whimpers.

As Christine and Eddie recovered from the scare and embarrassment of the false alarm, they made their way back down the hall toward their position. Eddie found a narrow corridor off the main hallway and stopped suddenly.

"Look at this," he whispered.

Christine joined him and watched as Eddie pointed to a series of doors. He ran his hand along a tiny section of square glass embedded into one of them.

"What are these little windows for?" Christine asked.

Eddie gulped. "Solitary confinement."

"But they're so small," Christine said, stepping into one of the tiny rooms. She ran her hand along the cold cement walls. "How awful that must have been for the poor people locked in these."

Eddie followed her, then closed the door and turned his flashlight on. The heavy wood door slammed shut with a sound of final authority. They couldn't hear anything but the sounds of their own breathing inside.

"Here," Eddie said, handing Christine his tiny video camera. "Press the red button on the top and get a shot of this."

Christine took the camera and a small light shone across the walls, covered with cobwebs. She pointed the lens directly at Eddie.

Eddie spoke, looking at her. "Solitary confinement," he stated. "Can you imagine the horror of being placed in here? Day after day, night after night. This is one of the many treatment programs that were executed by the late Dr. Blackwell, head of psychiatry. It's enough to make a sane person insane."

Christine shivered and Eddie motioned for her to turn off the camera.

Suddenly, the whirl of the generator downstairs groaned to a stop, which could be heard everywhere in the building except for the small cell. The dim light from the camera mounted down the hall snapped off.

Christine set down the camera and took Eddie's hand in hers.

Eddie flashed a smile at her. A wisp of her blond hair fell across her face. All he could think about was the fact that they were all alone and she was holding his hand.

He tried to avert his thoughts back to the documentary, but couldn't. His hormones had taken over his brain and he could only think about how Christine had looked in that tight dress earlier. How she'd seemed happy to find out that he was single.

He looked into her jade-colored eyes, which seemed to be calling out to him. Eddie followed his instincts and kissed her.

Christine returned the kiss and grinned up at him.

"What's the matter? What's so funny?" he asked.

"I was hoping you'd do that sooner or later," Christine said breathlessly.

Eddie wrapped his arms around her slender waist and kissed her again.

CHAPTER

10

When the generator snapped off, Stanley and Randy scattered like cockroaches to gather the lanterns. Randy didn't like being in the dark. Especially not here in this creepy old building. He always slept with a nightlight on at home.

The two boys stumbled up the stairs looking for Eddie. They had just left him up there a few minutes earlier.

"What do you think happened? Why did the power go off?" Randy questioned nervously.

Stanley snapped, "How am I supposed to know, dork! Let's just find Eddie. He'll know what happened."

"W-where did they go?" Randy wondered, staring down a dark, empty hallway.

"They were right up here a little while ago. Maybe they went downstairs." Stanley shrugged.

Randy's voice cracked as he called, "Eddie? Christine? You guys up here?"

Suddenly, a hollow bumping noise came from down the narrow corridor. They timidly followed the sound and saw that it was coming from behind a door.

The two boys froze in their tracks, trying to make out the sound. They both stared at each other for a moment.

Stanley whispered nervously and pointed at a closed door. "It's coming from in there!"

Randy's eyes were wide with fear. "We should call Eddie on the radio."

"What! And make fools out of ourselves again?" Stanley cackled. "I don't think so." He tugged at Randy's shirt. "Come on, we'll just check it out first."

Stanley crept up to the tiny glass window on the other side of the door and peeked inside. At first his eyes were wide, but then he began giggling and waved Randy over. He whispered, "It's not a ghost in there. It's better!"

Randy timidly approached the door. He guessed it couldn't be anything bad if Stanley was laughing. Stanley was pretty serious most of the time.

Randy peeked inside the room, where he saw Eddie and Christine making out. "Wow," he said in awe.

"Looks like Eddie's going for it in there with the blond chick!" Stanley whispered excitedly.

"He's so lucky. Christine Ray is such a babe." Randy sighed enviously. "Next summer I'm going to make my own documentary.

Girls like directors. I'll invite the entire cheerleading squad and they'll be crawling all over me."

"In your dreams!" Stanley cackled, pushing him out of the way. His breath had begun to fog up the glass.

Randy looked away from the tiny glass window, feeling a pang of guilt. "We shouldn't be spying on them. Eddie would kill us if he ever found out."

"Nonsense!" Stanley giggled. "This is great! Our own live peep show!"

"You need to get a life," Randy whined impatiently. "Besides, we need to tell him about the generator."

"What they're doing in there is generating enough electricity to light up an entire city!" Stanley giggled. "If we could only figure out how to harness such unbridled power!" he joked.

Randy's eyes opened wide. "What? What are they doing now?"

"Step aside," Stanley told him, swatting Randy away from the little window. "I found it first. So I get to watch."

Randy tried to peek over his shoulder to catch a glimpse. "Come on, man. Let me see."

Just as Stanley was about to tell Randy to take a walk, a set of heavy, slow footsteps became audible in the black hallway.

The boys looked at each other blankly and stood there in stunned silence. The footsteps stopped. "Who's there?" Stanley whispered meekly.

Randy's stomach tightened as he shone his flashlight down the dark, narrow corridor.

A hair-raising growl came from somewhere in the darkness. Stanley gulped heavily. "I said *who's there?*"

Stanley fidgeted nervously. The dead silence was really bothering him. Who was out there? Why weren't they answering?

Suddenly, Randy was hit from behind. His body crumpled to the ground in a flash of jolting pain. He shook his throbbing head and screamed when he opened his eyes and saw what was looming over him.

"Oh my god!"

A face, a horrifying face stared down from behind a withered plastic mask. The scar-puckered skin on the thing's hands and neck was almost glowing in the dim light. Randy opened his mouth to scream again and his voice was cut off by a worn, steel-toed boot that crushed into his jaw.

Stanley was in shock.

When his brain finally sent the signal to his legs to run, Michael Myers had already grabbed him by the neck. With a vicious growl, Michael Myers slammed Stanley's head into the hard, cement wall,

cracking his glasses. Stanley felt his body relax as a trickle of blood filled his right eye from a gash on his forehead. The pain faded as the blackness closed in around his eyes. The walkie-talkie fell out of his hand and clattered to the floor.

Michael Myers dragged their limp bodies down the hall and into another room with a sign marked "Operating Room."

The door slammed shut.

Julie's hands were covered with black grease and dirt from the oily chain that was hopelessly wound around the iron gates.

She ran back over to Brandon, who was cursing as the flat-tire solvent oozed right out of the tire into a white puddle on the ground. "I can't get the gates open," she said, panicking. "We're stuck in here!"

Brandon forced himself to think logically. The tires were shot beyond repair. "Okay," he said gently, trying to ease her hysteria. "Let's go back inside."

The moonlight silhouetted the monstrous building against the black sky. It looked even more threatening than before. Brandon didn't want to go back in there, but he didn't want to stay outside either. He grabbed a paper bag from the backseat of the car. "I've got a little surprise in here that's sure to lift your spirits. Since we're stuck here and all."

Julie cocked her head to the side, looking at the bag. "What? What's in there?" she asked.

Brandon grinned crookedly. "Booze. What else?" he replied, leading Julie through the main doors of the hospital. Her dark eyes flashed and she smiled mischevously at her babe boyfriend. "You're on," she said.

"How come it's so dark in here?" Julie whispered nervously.

"Looks like the power went off," Brandon said. "Come on. Let's go find everyone."

The couple made their way through the dark lobby and found a heavy door into the back wing of the hospital.

"This isn't the way," Julie hissed as they stepped through the doorway.

"Yes it is," he argued. "We were just in here—"

The heavy door slammed shut behind them. Brandon reached for the handle, but there wasn't one.

The door had locked itself from the outside.

"What's wrong!" Julie panicked, watching Brandon push and then throw his body up against the door.

"It must have locked from the outside," he said and gulped. He pointed down a dark, unfamiliar hallway. "We'll go down there and find our way back around," he decided.

Julie squinted into the darkness. The only light source was the moon, which shone through a dirt-caked window that was almost entirely boarded up. "No, Brandon! I'm not going in there!" she declared.

"Do you have a better idea?" he growled sarcastically. "We can't go back the way we came in."

"Fine," Julie said and gulped weakly.

She followed Brandon down the dusty corridor. Julie pushed on every door, but they were all sealed up with boards.

At the end of the corridor, Brandon came across a pitch-black stairwell. "Let's try upstairs," he said, hoping that his voice didn't sound as shaky as his legs felt.

Julie latched onto Brandon's arm as they carefully climbed the dark stairs, one at a time.

On the second floor, the couple found more boarded-up doors and another dark hallway.

After unsuccessfully searching for a link to the other side of the hospital or a way out, Brandon flopped onto an old, worn couch. "We'll just wait here," he said, not knowing what else to do.

Julie sighed heavily and plopped down next to him. "Great. This is just great."

"Well, who's the one who just had to come here tonight?" he said with a hint of blame in his voice.

Anger flashed in Julie's eyes. "Don't get me started, Brandon. This is not the time or the place to start arguing."

"You're right," he said. "It was my fault for opening the wrong door. Maybe someone will come looking for us."

"I hope so," Julie said. She looked into Brandon's eyes, which seemed to be smiling, and she felt a little better.

Brandon pulled a bottle of wine from the paper bag he was carrying. "We might as well enjoy ourselves," he suggested with a sly, crooked grin on his lips.

Julie grabbed the bottle and managed to get it open. She took a long gulp of the red liquid. "Cheers," she said. "At least we're in this together."

CHAPTER

12

Eddie's lips urgently pushed against Christine's. She was the most deliciously desirable girl he'd ever been around. And she wasn't trying to stop him. He pressed his body tightly to hers against the hard wall. This was like a dream come true.

Her heart pounded wildly as she ran her hands through his glossy hair. She removed his glasses, which fell to the floor. She heard herself sigh. Eddie kissed her harder and wrapped his arms around her slender waist.

Christine pushed him back gently and took a deep breath. "Wow," she said. Things were moving very fast and she had to stop and think for a minute.

Against her instincts, she straightened her dishelved hair and whispered, "We'd better stop now."

Eddie's blood was pulsing rapidly through his entire body. He sighed and looked achingly at her. "Sorry. I didn't mean to rush you and—"

Christine placed a finger on his lips. "It's okay. I liked it." She was a little embarrassed by her behavior. She'd never kissed a guy like that on a first date. In fact, she'd never kissed a guy like she'd just kissed Eddie. "Maybe we should go check on everyone," she suggested. "We'll have lots of time to get to know each other." She smiled. "This place, right now, just doesn't feel right."

Eddie didn't agree. It felt better that anything he'd ever experienced in his entire life. But he didn't argue. "I understand," he said, picking his glasses up from the floor.

He grabbed the camera and opened the door.

Something was wrong. It was too dark. He noticed that the dim light that had been set up next to the camera at the end of the hall was out.

"Shoot! The generator!" he cried. "It's not working."

Christine was startled. "How could it have gone off?" she asked.

"Either we overloaded it or it ran out of gasoline. This is just what we need right now." Eddie pouted.

"It's probably just out of gas," Christine assured him, taking his hand in hers.

For a moment, Eddie didn't care about the generator. He wanted to kiss her again.

"Let's go down to the lobby and check it out," Christine suggested.

Eddie shone his flashlight around the hallway, looking at the camera. It was still plugged in.

Christine felt her heartbeat pick up and she shrieked at what she saw. "Eddie! Shine your light back this way! Right there!" she directed.

Confused by her sudden hysteria, he did as he was told and pointed

the beam of light to the spot she was staring at. There was blood spattered all over the floor. Eddie sucked in his breath and bent down to touch the sticky globs with his fingers. He gasped. "It's blood!"

Christine cringed and stepped away from the small pools of blood just outside the door. She realized she was also standing in it. She panicked. "Oh my god! But who?"

Christine lunged toward the staircase and nearly lost her balance as she ran down in the darkness. "Come on!" she shouted. "Someone must have gotten hurt!"

Eddie bounded down behind her.

They found Jason and Howard in the lobby looking curiously at the silent generator. "This old piece of crap," Jason grunted. He gave it a hard whack on the side.

Christine and Eddie surprised them as they rushed into the room. "Are you guys okay?" Christine huffed.

"Never been better," Jason said sarcastically, looking at the tangle of extension cords surrounding the generator.

Howard's massive body moved around the generator as he inspected the scene. "Looks like we've got a joker here. Someone unplugged all the cords and turned it off."

Eddie looked around the lobby. "Have you guys seen the rest of the crew? We just found some blood upstairs."

"Blood?" Jason asked dumbly. "As in real blood?"

Christine nodded. "We're afraid someone got hurt or something. Have you seen Julie and Brandon?" she asked, suddenly getting very worried.

"Or Stanley and Randy or Maggie?" Eddie asked.

Howard looked a little pale. "No. We've been in the downstairs east wing by the camera. Our power went out, so we came in here to see what was going on. We figured you must have turned it off."

Eddie shook his head. "No. Let's get this thing fired up and then we'll go look for everyone."

They all nodded in agreement. Eddie plugged the extension cords back into the switch box and cranked the handle on the generator. The loud machine sputtered and then groaned to life.

But there was a new noise now.

One that hadn't been there before.

The teenagers stared at one another for a moment.

Christine whispered, "It sounds electrical. Like buzzing!"

Just then, Eddie noticed a new extension cord running down the dark hallway. "What is that?"

"I don't know," Jason shrugged. He pointed to the other side of the room. "The cord to our camera is over there."

The buzzing became louder.

"Come on!" Eddie shouted. "It's coming from this way!"

Christine, Jason and Howard followed Eddie's brisk pace as he followed the cord. It disappeared under a closed door.

"What's in there?" Christine asked fearfully.

Eddie shoved open the door and screamed at what he saw.

The buzzing noise was almost deafening. Maggie's twitching body was strapped to the table. Her bugged-out eyes were open and her face was badly burned by the metal disks on her temples. Her back was arched backward in a sickeningly crooked angle and a light mist of acrid smoke filled the room.

Eddie screamed. "Jason! Go turn it off! Go! Go!"

Jason peeked into the room and went pale. "Oh god no!" he screamed. Instantly, he stepped into the room and pulled the extension cord out of the black box. "Oh please no!" he sobbed.

Christine was totally frantic. She poked her head inside and saw it with her own eyes. "Noooooooo!"

Eddie stood there in shock.

Maggie's body was still and unmoving now.

Christine gulped. "Is she... dead?"

Jason's eyes were wild with panic. He could barely feel his numb body. "We're out of here! She's dead! We've got to get help!"

Eddie ripped the plastic headband off Maggie's skull and felt for a pulse. He shook her limp body. "Mag! Mag! Please wake up! Mag!" he howled.

Howard ran out of the room and collapsed in the hallway vomiting.

"Oh god, Eddie! Oh god! She's dead!" Christine cried hysterically.

Eddie cradled Maggie's broken body in his arms. "Who did this to you, Mag? Who? Come on, buddy! Wake up!" he sobbed.

Christine had to pull Eddie out of the room and shut the door. "I'm so sorry, Eddie! My god! Who did this!"

Jason pulled Howard up from the floor. "I don't want to stick around to find out! Come on, Howard!" he screamed.

Howard stood up and looked helplessly at Eddie and Christine. Tears rolled down his chubby cheeks. He held back another wave of nausea and stumbled after Jason, who had already bolted out the front doors.

Eddie banged his head against the wall and let out a pitiful wail. "I killed her! I'm the one who flipped the switch! And now she's dead. It's all my fault."

Christine made Eddie sit down in the lobby. She gently touched his shoulder and said soothingly, "It's not your fault. You didn't know, Eddie. It was an accident."

"Accident!" Eddie bellowed. "What happened in there was no accident! Somebody killed her."

It took Christine a minute to get over the shock of the terrible

tragedy. She sat silently with Eddie until a horrifying thought entered her mind.

Whoever murdered Maggie was probably still close by. Still in the building.

Christine's heart began racing as her eyes frantically darted around the room. Through the window she noticed that the gates were locked and the tires had been slashed. And to make matters worse, Julie, Brandon, Stanley and Randy were still missing. They were trapped here.

Christine shook Eddie by the shoulders. "Come on!" she said, panicking. "We've got to find everybody."

Eddie was still in shock and glanced at her through glazed eyes.

"Get up, Eddie!" Christine hollered. "Unless you want to be next!"

CHAPTER

13

Stanley opened his eyes and shook his throbbing head wearily. The ceiling above came into focus through his shattered eyeglasses. "Where am I?" he wondered aloud. A lantern was flickering from somewhere in the dimly lit room. He remembered that something had happened. Something bad. But it was all a blur.

Instantly, he tried to sit up, vaguely remembering that he'd been attacked, but he found that his body was tied down to a table.

As his eyes adjusted to the dim light in the room, he rolled his head to the side and screamed.

His buddy Randy was laying on another table next to him in the little room.

But Randy wasn't tied down.

Randy wasn't moving.

Stanley knew that something was horribly wrong the instant he saw the congealed blood caked all over his friend's s freckled face and matted in his red hair. Stanley's eyes involuntarily traveled to something gleaming.

He felt as if he were suffocating when he saw that the metal object that looked like a letter opener was embedded through Randy's eye socket. Fresh blood dripped from the sickening wound onto the white, linoleum floor.

Drip-drip-drip.

A hot wave of terror numbed Stanley's body and he struggled to break free from the ropes that bound him. "Randy! Get up!" he croaked helplessly, knowing damn well that his friend would never get up again.

"Help! Help me!" he yelled out into the darkness. His voice was dry and his throat hurt. The smell of blood filled the room. He forced himself to look away from Randy's mutilated body.

Suddenly, something moved in the corner of the room and Stanley knew that whoever had done this was coming to finish him off. He thrashed around violently and the sound of his own voice pummeled his ears.

The footsteps moved across the room and he suddenly recalled what had happened.

"Help! Somebody help me!" he screamed.

The dark, unrecognizable form in the corner stepped toward the dim bath of light on the counter. The hideous form oozed with pure hate and evil as its eyes fixed upon its prey. Evil, soulless eyes, that peered out from behind a child's plastic Halloween mask.

Stanley instantly knew who the figure was, or who he had been.

Against all sanity, and beyond his own screaming voice, he knew that it was Michael Myers.

He knew that he was going to die.

"N-no! P-please! Oh no! Don't do this! Don't!" Stanley blubbered.

Michael Myers stood directly above Stanley. The ropes cut deep into Stanley's skin as he struggled to somehow escape.

Michael Myers's hot, rancid breath touched his cheek. There seemed to be only dark, pitted voids behind the eye holes of the mask.

With a blood-covered hand, Michael Myers ripped the surgical knife from his redheaded victim's head and raised it up toward the ceiling.

Stanley pleaded hysterically. "Oh no! Oh please no! I don't wanna dieeeeeee!"

The blade crushed through Stanley's eyeball with a sickening pop and sank deep into his brain.

CHAPTER

14

Jason's wiry frame moved swiftly and lightly across the broken asphalt and weed-choked landscape of the hospital. Howard wheezed as he struggled to move his fear numbed, overweight body to catch up with Jason.

"Shoot!" Jason screamed as he met the front gates. He shook the solid iron fence desperately. "Someone locked us in! We're going to have to climb over!"

Howard had to stop to catch his breath. He felt if he were dreaming. Nothing seemed real right now. "No way, man!" he shouted, looking up at the fifteen-foot-high fence. "It's too high!"

"You got a better idea!" Jason yelled, on the fringe of madness. He grasped onto a rod in the fence and began inching his way upward.

""There's barbwire on the top!" Howard protested through his thick lips. He felt more hopeless tears welling up in his eyes. "I can't climb it, man! I'm too heavy!" he screeched.

Jason was almost at the top when he looked down at Howard.

Jason froze in terror at what he saw.

A shadowed figure clad in a bloody black jumpsuit and a hideous white plastic mask had emerged from the side of the building. The figure growled and moved toward the boys, holding a gleaming shovel in his hand.

"Run!" Jason screamed down at Howard. "He's coming! He's behind you!"

Jason was able to hoist his body over the barbwire and perch on top of the fence to watch the nightmarish scene below through horrified eyes.

Howard screamed when he turned around and saw the hideous monster stumbling toward them.

It was Michael Myers.

In a flash, Howard jumped on the fence, which shook the iron gates violently. He hoisted his body up the fence a few feet. Jason screamed, "Come on! Move!" and held his hand down for Howard to grab.

"I c-can't do it!" Howard cried. "C-can't pull up anymore!"

Howard's weight pulled Jason forward over the fence and a razor-sharp strand of barbwire sunk into his shoulder. Jason let go of Howard's hand from the sudden shock of pain. Howard howled and toppled back to the ground in a heap.

"Help me! Oh god! Help me!" Howard screamed, trying to get his massive body up from the ground. The footsteps crunched across the ground just feet behind him. Howard rolled up into a ball and sobbed.

Michael Myers started toward him, his withered white hand

tightening on the shovel.

Jason ripped the barbwire out of his flesh while screaming commands to Howard below. "Move! Move!"

Michael Myers raised his shovel above Howard and the rusty metal blade descended upon his soft skull, which exploded like an overripe watermelon.

Jason couldn't move for a moment. His friend was dead.

Michael Myers stared up at him with his burning, black eyes.

In a flash, Jason let go and landed painfully on the other side of the fence.

Michael Myers dropped the shovel and began climbing the fence after him.

Jason was too afraid to look back. He just kept running toward the main highway. He tripped on a chunk of broken cement and got up again. He knew he would die too if he got caught.

After running for nearly a mile, Jason could see the highway up ahead. He looked back and heard a set of footsteps crushing leaves just yards behind.

Run! Keep running! he told himself, trying to block out the nightmarish image of Michael Myers and the dead bodies.

Jason dove into a large ditch and clawed his way up the other side. The highway was deserted. There was no one driving on the road.

He kept running along the dotted yellow line in the center. The cut on his shoulder burned and his mind spun with the horrifying events of the night.

As if in answer to a prayer, a pair of headlights rounded the bend. It was an eighteen-wheeler barreling down the road.

The face of Michael Myers appeared from out of the ditch below and a hideous growl emitted from his mouth.

Jason kept running in the road and waved his arms wildly. "Help! Stop! Stop!" he screamed at the monstrous truck.

The truck, carrying two huge metal cylinders, blew its horn. It was traveling too fast to stop.

Michael Myers pulled his body out of the ditch and out into the road.

The horn blared again and the driver slammed on the truck's brakes.

Jason froze as the headlights closed in on him. "Stop!" he screamed.

In an instant, the massive truck jackknifed and slid across the road, taking out trees and road signs as if in slow motion.

Too late to move, Jason stood in the road as the massive wall of metal and sparks closed in on him and sucked his body beneath its weight and force.

The overturned truck slid to a stop, leaving behind skid marks and a long smear of fresh blood on the asphalt.

All was silent for a moment. Then suddenly the tanker truck ignited

and exploded with earth-shattering force. A bright ball of orange flames licked the sky, lighting up the night like broad daylight.

Michael Myers picked up something large and round by the side of the road and carefully cradled it in his arms. He turned away from the fiery explosion and made his way back through the ditch and the overgrown brush toward the pitch-black hospital.

CHAPTER

15

"Oh my god!" Christine yelled after having just seen and heard the explosion that lit up the dark sky and rattled the windows and doors of the hospital. "What was that?"

Eddie blinked his red-brimmed eyes and snapped out of his grief over Maggie's death. "I don't know!"

"Howard and Jason!" Christine cried. "They just went out there!"

Eddie jumped to his feet and opened the front door. "Howard! Jason!" he screamed.

Eddie's heart raced as he scanned the grounds. His eyes fell upon Howard's limp body by the front gates. He shuddered, thinking that he were losing his mind. Panic pounded through his guts.

After a moment, Eddie closed the door and leaned against the glass as if he were holding it shut. "There's a big fire up on the highway," he said in a raw, dry voice that he almost didn't recognize. "And Howard is dead. His body is up by the fence"

Christine gulped and a wave of fear washed over her. "Oh my god!" She grabbed Eddie by the arm. "Let's go! We've got to find the others!"

Eddie hastily locked the door and grabbed his radio. He frantically spoke into the black box. "Come in. Stanley, Randy! Answer me if you're okay!"

There was no reply, only scratchy silence.

They reached the top of the stairs and burst through the swinging door that sectioned off the corridor. Eddie spoke into the radio again, this time with more fear and urgency in his rattled voice. "Come in! Come in!"

From the dark corner of the hallway, Eddie could hear the static from another radio. "There they are!" he told Christine, pointing down the hall.

Eddie threw a beam of light from his flashlight into the corner. It was only Stanley's radio. "What the..." Eddie inhaled. "Stanley would never just leave his radio lying around."

"They must be in trouble," Christine whispered. She averted her eyes from the blood smears on the floor, preparing herself for the worst. Everyone was missing and at least two of them were dead, Howard and Maggie. She whimpered in fear.

Eddie pulled his miniature video camera out and turned it on. "We've got to document this. Maybe we can catch the killer's image on tape!"

Eddie silenced Christine as a banging and vicious growling noise came from downstairs. "The front door! Someone's breaking in!" Eddie whispered, panic rising in his throat.

The horrible sounds from below made the hair on the back of Christine's neck stand up. "We've got to hide!" she cried, unable to stop trembling.

Eddie picked the first door he saw and began tugging and clawing on the board that nailed it shut. Christine dug her nails into the wood and helped him pull.

The front door downstairs burst open with the sound of shattering glass and splintering wood, which echoed through the cold, still corridors of the building.

Christine looked wildly around just as Eddie was able to rip the board loose and open the door. The couple slipped inside and slammed it behind them. Inside the room was a counter and several glass cabinets mounted to the walls. Eddie set the camera on the counter and searched around for something to use as a weapon.

Christine's entire body was still shaking. "Someone is killing people! Someone is—"

Eddie's heart threatened to explode as the sound of heavy footsteps walked down the hall outside. He spun around and waved at her to be silent.

The footsteps stopped outside the door.

Whoever was out there knew that they were inside. The stench of rot and blood wafted under the door as the thing sniffed out their scent like a crazed, wild animal.

"Oh god!" Christine whispered. "He's here!"

Eddie threw his body against the door with a bang. Seconds later, the noise was answered by a crushing blow from the other side. Eddie screamed, "Look in the cabinets! Find something! A weapon! Anything!"

The blood pounded through Christine's ears as she threw open several drawers. "There's only needles and cups in here!" she cried.

The blows to the door were more frequent now, coming every few seconds. Eddie screamed, "Come on! Find something! I can't hold it closed much longer!"

Christine slid a metal chair toward Eddie. "Here! Jam it under the doorknob!" she commanded.

Eddie positioned the chair, which was barely strong enough to hold the door.

Christine took off her shoe and broke the glass on one of the cabinets on the wall. She climbed up and felt around on the shelf. Something smooth and round touched her fingertips.

"Ouch!" she whimpered as a shard of broken glass sliced the palm of

her hand.

The wood of the door slammed against the metal chair, which scooted forward an inch.

Christine reached back into the cabinet and felt around until she finally grasped the object.

"Shoot!" she cursed, throwing the object to the floor. "It's just a stupid bottle!"

Christine covered her ears as the wooden door splintered, threatening to burst open at any moment. The sound of her own rapid breathing filled her ears. She tried to be quiet. Had to calm down and think. Tried to hide. Forced herself to not scream. She crammed her body under the counter in the smallest, tightest ball she could. Eddie moved toward the door.

"What are you doing!" she whimpered before she could stop herself.

Eddie stood by the side of the door and suddenly moved the chair out of the way. One more bang, one more push—

Crash!

A flash of darkness rushed into the room and slammed into the back wall, shattering an old wooden cabinet into thousands of pieces.

Eddie's eyes darted around desperately, searching for something to use as a weapon. With no time to think, he removed a shard of glass from the floor and drove it into the back of the figure with all of his strength. Eddie screamed out as the glass sliced his own hand.

Eddie leaped forward and tried to jump out of the way as the figure came at him with unearthly force.

Christine screamed as the attacker growled through bared teeth and seemed to consume Eddie with his hulking frame. Sounds of hard blows, grunts and scattering broken glass filled the room at nearly deafening decibels.

Eddie screamed out, "Help! Hit him! Get him off meeeeeee!"

Christine sprang out from behind the counter and was about to kick the attacker when he suddenly turned around and looked into her eyes. The withered, scar-puckered skin behind the mask seemed to glow in the dark and his entire being emanated a force of pure evil. She froze, unable to move. A tiny, helpless squeak escaped from her throat.

It was Michael Myers.

"My god... my god..., she whispered on the brink of madness. "Y-you're not real! You're not..."

With outstretched arms, he moved toward her as if in slow motion. Eddie saw him going for Christine and heard her cry out.

The dark shape of Michael Myers engulfed Christine, toppling them both to the floor. His rotten, bloody hands clasped around her neck. Christine's heart hammered in her chest. She choked. "Eddie!"

Eddie could see the shard of glass planted in the center of Michael

Myers's back. Using all his strength, he stomped down on the sharp shard with his boot, embedding it deeply in the massive body.

Michael Myers shuddered and then fell limp on top of Christine, who was uncontrollably screaming and sobbing. The large hands gripping her throat relaxed and she gasped for air.

It took a moment for Eddie to realize that Michael Myers was no longer moving. A circle of deep red blood seeped out around the hideous wound in his back.

Eddie thought he'd killed him.

Christine crawled from beneath the rotten stench of Michael Myers's body and clutched at Eddie's arm. "*Is he dead?*"

Eddie's eyes darted from Christine to the limp body, trying to come back to reality. "I don't know. We've got to get out of here!"

Christine pulled her foot out from under the body's arm and screamed as Michael Myers let out a hiss of air, almost a sigh.

Eddie grabbed a bottle he found on the floor. "It's Thorazine!" he cried. "Quick! Give me that needle you found!"

Christine frantically searched back through the drawers and handed him a needle. She watched as he filled it. "Eddie!" she protested. "We've got to get out of here! Now!"

Eddie held up the needle with trembling hands, then filled it with the thick yellow liquid. "It might keep him down longer! I don't know if he's dead or not!" he hissed.

Christine was still trying to believe that this was actually happening.

Overtured cabinets and shattered glass littered the linoleum floor. From a drawer that had been thrown open during the fight, Eddie extracted a dusty, stained strait-jacket. "Help me put this on him! Quick!" he whispered.

Christine backed away trembling, still staring at the hideous nest of matted hair that grew in jagged patches out of Michael Myers's skull. She placed a hand upon her own neck where he'd tried to choke the life out of her.

Eddie raised his voice and shook her arm. "Come on, Christine! Help me!" he ordered, trying to snap her out of her shock.

Eddie stuffed Michael Myers's arms into the strait-jacket, kicked the body over on its back and hastily buckled the straps in place, not knowing if he'd done it correctly. He cringed when he saw that the sickening white mask was spattered with fresh blood. He looked away from the glassy black eyes that stared up at him blankly.

Is he dead?

Christine sobbed as she helped tighten the ties on the jacket.

Eddie refilled the needle with the rest of the solution in the bottle and jabbed it into the body. He picked up his flashlight and stuffed it into his waistband. "Come on! Let's get out of here!"

Eddie picked up the still running camera and dragged Christine down the corridor. Before they'd reached the end, they heard movement coming from the room they'd just exited. Eddie tensed up involuntarily. "He's moving around in there! Damn it!" he cursed harshly. His heart hammered in his chest.

Had he secured the straitjacket correctly?

He hoped so! It had all happened so fast!

Christine reached to open the midway door, which led to the stairs, and found that it had been shut and locked, trapping them inside. She stopped whimpering momentarily and searched in the darkness for another escape route.

They didn't have time to break down another boarded-up doorway.

Think!

Eddie saw it first. He rushed over to a tiny metal trapdoor in the wall and began prying it open with his nails.

Thrashing sounds came from the room down the hall where they'd left the body. Christine panicked. "What is it, Eddie!"

With a final tug, the small door opened. "Come on!" he whispered. "It's an old laundry chute!"

He hoisted Christine inside and she disappeared into the blackness, screaming all the way to the bottom.

Crash!

Eddie peered down the hallway at the splintered doorway one last time and jumped inside, closing the door behind himself before he slid down.

Eddie landed painfully at the bottom of the laundry chute, half on the cement floor, half on Christine's leg.

She let out a loud whelp "Ouch! I'm stuck!" she cried, trying to free herself from a tangle of ropes.

Eddie extracted the video camera from his vest so he could use the built-in light to see where they were. He could barely move.

He shone a beam of light and saw that they had fallen into crude netting made of thick ropes and cords in the bowels of a dusty, dark basement. Eddie cursed and tried to struggle free.

It was no use.

They were trapped like helpless flies in a complex spiderweb.

"What is this place?" Christine whispered shakily as she tried to wedge her leg out from under Eddie. "Where are we?"

The basement looked as if someone had been living there. Several empty wine bottles, candles and stacks of scattered medical records were strewn across the floor, along with a few worn blankets and pillows that had been heaped together in the corner. The smell of human waste and decay filled the damp, still air in the dusty den.

"I don't know!" Eddie said nervously, noticing the fear in his own voice. He swallowed hard. "But it looks like we're the guests of honor."

"Oh my god!" she sobbed. "This must be Michael Myers's hideout! Oh, Eddie. We've got to get out before he finds us here!"

Eddie forced himself to think. He squinted his eyes shut and tried to return to his normally logical self in the midst of this madness. "Start pulling at each strand of rope," he told her. "If we can get one loose, we might be able to escape."

Christine began tugging at the tightly knotted trap. Her hands were becoming raw from the tugging and pulling, which didn't seem to be helping. She put her hands to her face and whispered hysterically, "I can still see him, those dead eyes staring at me! And the smell! I feel like it's all over me!"

Suddenly, light, dragging footsteps scuffled from somewhere in the basement. Eddie and Christine froze in horror as a flickering candle illuminated the far corner of the room. An evil, taunting laughter cackled sharply against the stone walls from somewhere in the darkness.

"What do you want with us!" Eddie blurted out, pointing the camera toward the light.

The laughter stopped abruptly and a hideous figure appeared.

Christine and Eddie screamed together at what they saw.

The unusually tall, skeletonlike figure floated toward them draped in

a filthy, worn doctor's coat. With a toothless smile upon its ghastly pale face, it extracted a gleaming scalpel from its pocket and clutched it with a set of yellowed claws. The thing's wild white hair and sunken eyes bore into the screaming teens.

Christine clutched onto Eddie and stammered, "It's the g-ghost of the deranged psychiatrist!" The reality of what was happening numbed her entire body.

Eddie was too shocked to say anything. He couldn't move. He could only stare at the dreadful apparition that was closing in on them.

The thing that was surely going to kill them.

The ragged, rasping voice began laughing again.

Christine, crazed with fear, began screaming in a glass-shattering pitch as the thing swung the blade of the scalpel at them.

Eddie squeezed his eyes shut and threw himself over Christine in an attempt to save her from death.

Christine's heart pounded in her chest and she kept thinking it was strange how she didn't feel the scalpel plunging into her flesh by now. The movement of the rope net had stopped and Eddie lay motionless upon her. She could feel his rapid breathing. Christine forced herself to open one eye.

The sunken-faced thing had receded across the room and was staring back at her through slitted eyes. She suddenly realized that the ropes had been cut. "Eddie!" she whispered. "Eddie! He's letting us go!"

Eddie raised his spinning head. He didn't know what to think. He made himself sit up and face the ghost.

Before Eddie could speak, the thing stepped forward and moved its lips. "Who are you!" it shouted. The harshly spoken words pounded into Eddie's eardrums.

Christine jumped back and brushed the ropes off her legs. It was all too much to believe.

Eddie clutched Christine's arm as the figure moved closer. As the ragged thing stepped into the light of the candle, Eddie suddenly realized that this was not a ghost at all. It was a real man. "He's real! He's just a person!" Eddie whispered to Christine.

"Yes. Of course I'm real. I'm Dr. Blackwell," said the figure overhearing the teenager. "But who are you and what are you doing in my hospital!" the old man demanded.

Christine instantly knew that something was wrong with this man as she stared into his blazing eyes. He was mad. Completely and totally mad. "Uh. We came here to film a ghost," she said.

The old man put the scalpel back in his pocket and cocked his head curiously. "Ghost? Why, there're no ghosts here."

Eddie hushed Christine and carefully worded his response. "We're very sorry. We didn't mean to bother you. But we're all in great

danger!"

Christine stammered, "Michael Myers is upstairs. He's already killed some of our friends and he was coming after us and—"

Dr. Blackwell silenced her with a wild wave of his arm. He whispered, "Damn it! Where is he?"

Eddie pointed a shaky finger toward the ceiling. "He's up there. We gave him a shot of Thorazine and tied him up in a straitjacket. But he started moving around before we found the laundry chute."

The doctor laughed as if Eddie had just told the funniest joke he'd ever heard. "Michael Myers has had so much Thorazine in his lifetime, he's practically immune to it's effects. But you say you tied him up? In a straitjacket?"

Christine stammered. "Y-yes. We just barely escaped." Her skin crawled at the creepy, dark circles under the doctor's eyes. "He tried to kill us."

Rubbing his chin as if in deep thought, Dr. Blackwell commented, "Interesting. Very interesting."

Dr. Blackwell ran his dirty hand along Eddie's back. Eddie shivered as the long, yellowed fingernails touched his shirt. Eddie pleaded, "We've got to get out of here! Can you help us?"

Christine stared wide-eyed at Eddie. The deranged psychiatrist! He was well and alive! Well, not well, but alive. This was too weird.

"Perhaps," Dr. Blackwell decided. "The odds are in our favor if you were able to tie him up. I've never been able to subdue him since I came back."

"Is there a back way out of here?" Eddie asked eagerly.

"No!" Dr. Blackwell hissed. "We must plan this out carefully one step at a time. You don't understand what you're dealing with here."

Christine certainly understood that they were all going to die if they just sat there. She had to get this madman to understand. Maybe he'd come to his senses.

Eddie sat down on a rusty folding chair, continuing to film, as the doctor thumbed through a thick, dusty book. "How long have you been back here, Dr. Blackwell? I don't mean to sound disrespectful, but we'd heard that you were dead. That's why we came here. To film your ghost."

Dr. Blackwell looked up from the book and around the room at the pitiful surroundings. "I was once head of psychiatry here, many years ago. My work was written up in many medical journals. My approaches to cases were, let's say, a little ahead of their time," he bragged.

"Like shocking people to death and giving lobotomies?" Christine blurted out without thinking. "What kind of therapy is that!"

"Who told you that?" the old man hissed. "Who dares to question my practices!"

Eddie took a deep breath and answered in Christine's defense. "I-I looked at the autopsy reports. There were three deaths by electroshock therapy and a few deaths of patients who had lobotomies."

"You know nothing!" the pitiful old man spat out. The kids cringed back as his eyes darted around wildly. "You don't know what you're talking about! And turn off that damn camera!"

Eddie quickly turned it off. Christine was really shaken by the doctor's response and knew that they had to get away from this lunatic as soon as possible.

The old man suddenly slammed the book shut and stared at them, his eyes empty. His authoritative veneer seemed to fall away in pieces and he began to weep. "I'm old now. I have nothing. Nothing but painful memories. Nothing but regrets and failure." He wiped a tear from his cheek and continued. "I must capture Michael Myers. I blame myself for his wrongdoing. I am an accomplice to each and every one of his murders."

"What do you mean?" Eddie asked nervously.

The doctor sniveled. "I tried everything to get a response. Rage therapy, electroshock, solitary confinement. Nothing worked. I experimented on him unbeknownst to his regular doctor. When Michael Myers first came here, he was just a boy of six. He'd murdered his own sister on Halloween. He didn't speak a word for fifteen years. He was plotting, planning his escape. His revenge upon society. I feel that I played a key part in that. I should have never interrupted his treatment plan. I should have never—" He looked at the teenagers with dull eyes. "Perhaps if I hadn't done the things I did, maybe things would have turned out differently."

Christine didn't disagree. She was horrified by the idea of electroshock. She'd seen what it had done to Maggie. How the electricity had snapped her spine and charred her face. She held back a wave of nausea.

Eddie nervously rubbed a spot off his glasses. "So how do we get out?" he asked impatiently.

The doctor pulled himself together. "I've been watching the grounds for months. Waiting for the right moment. This... horrible place, this basement is where he's been living like a wild animal all these years." He pointed to a grimy nest made up of old newspapers and tattered sheets in the corner. "This is his den. I've been waiting for him to come down here. That's why I rigged up the trap. I've been planning to capture him and right the wrong I've created. We've got to be careful. Michael Myers is a monster. A bloodthirsty monster—"

The old man's voice suddenly went silent as a metallic screeching noise echoed from upstairs.

Christine shrieked, "He's free! Oh god! We've got to get out of here!"

Upstairs on the old couch, Brandon handed Julie the nearly empty wine bottle. She giggled uproariously and greedily polished off the last of the red liquid.

"Now what?" she asked, slurring the words. "I'm bored." Her head was spinning and she'd pretty much forgotten the fact that they were trapped in the gloomy old hospital.

"Yeah," Brandon agreed. "This place really sucks. Remind me to never go anywhere with Christine again."

Julie smiled dryly. "What a stupid idea this was. How come you talked us into coming here?"

Brandon began tickling Julie. "So you're admitting you're wrong for once!" Brandon teased. "Come on! Admit it!"

Howling with laughter, Julie managed to hold Brandon's hand back for a moment. "Okay! Okay! I'm Sorry!" she screeched.

Retreating from his tickle attack, Brandon sat back and flashed a smile at her. "You're beautiful when you're wrong. Did you know that?"

"Oh right! Thanks a lot!" She giggled, then twisted a lock of her waist-length hair and glanced around. "So now what are we going to do? Do you think anyone has noticed that we're missing yet?"

"Nah. Those dorks are busy chasing ghosts down there," he said sarcastically.

Julie glanced around nervously and thought she saw a shadow move in the corner. She did a doubletake and saw that it was just a tree in the window, casting a shadow on the wall. "Do you believe in ghosts?" she asked suddenly. "I mean, maybe the ghost was the one who slashed our tires and locked the gates."

"Absolutely not," Brandon declared. "What happened out there was the work of one of those geeks. And I'm going to find out who it was and kick his wimpy little butt. Mark my words."

"But why would they do something like that?" she asked, not quite believing that one of the crew would have sabotaged all of the vehicles.

"Who knows?" Brandon said. "Geeks are weird, you know? That's why they're geeks. They're not normal like you and me."

Julie felt the wine traveling to her head, making her feel light-headed. "Normal," she said and sighed. "What is normal anyway?"

Brandon placed his hand on her knee and gave it a knowing squeeze. "This is normal," he said, leaning in to plant a kiss on her lips. He gently stroked her pale face with his hands. "Why don't we finish off what we started before we were so rudely interrupted?" he suggested.

Julie patted the arm of the couch, which brought up a cloud of dust. "Not here," she said and coughed. "Not after what happened earlier.

Someone might come up here to rescue us. It's too risky. No privacy."

Brandon lazily glanced down the dark hallway. "There's no one up here, Julie. We're locked in. Remember? Besides, even if they did come up here, we'd hear them first. It's quiet as a morgue."

Julie stood up and stretched her legs. She stumbled backward a little, which made her giggle. "Why don't we just go in there?" she asked and pointed.

Brandon squinted through the darkness at the open door she was pointing at. "How'd that get open?" he wondered. "I could have sworn we checked every door and they were all locked or sealed shut."

"Maybe the concierge opened it for us. They might even have room service and cable TV," Julie said sarcastically. She rolled her eyes and pulled Brandon to his feet. "We must have just missed it. Who cares?"

"Yeah." Brandon laughed nervously. "Who cares?"

Julie stepped into the room first. "Look!" she exclaimed. "There's even a little cot in here!"

Brandon felt his hormones taking over, overriding his nervousness. He put his hands on Julie's shoulders and leaned in to give her a kiss. Julie's warm lips met his and they embraced passionately. "Looks like this trip might not be so bad after all," she said, staring into his eyes.

"It's been a trip, all right. A head trip," he said. Brandon peeled off his shirt, grinning. "I'm still never going to be at the cabin instead of locked up in this dump. We could have been in front of a roaring fireplace."

"It's August," Julie reminded him. "It's a little too hot for a fire. Don't you think?"

"I'm already hot," Brandon joked. He flopped backward onto the cot and tried to make himself comfortable on the lumpy bed. He patted the sheets and motioned for Julie to come over.

Suddenly and without warning, the cot began to move and the white sheet engulfed Brandon. He began screaming and thrashing around.

"Get him off me! Help!"

Julie watched wide-eyed for a second and then began laughing. "Come on, Brandon! Stop fooling around! You almost scared me!"

The smile instantly faded from Julie's face when she realized that Brandon really was screaming.

Something was wrong.

A sharp, piercing fear stabbed through her brain.

A pair of arms clad in an untied straitjacket suddenly whipped around Brandon's bare chest and a hideous, masked face appeared at the head of the bed. The evil, vicious eyes of the thing bore into her.

It was Michael Myers.

Before Julie could react, she saw the rusty operating knife that Michael Myers clutched in his hand.

"Help meeeeeeee!" Brandon screeched as he kicked his legs around wildly.

Julie shook her head in disbelief and stumbled back against the wall, watching in horrified fascination as the knife sliced into Brandon's abdomen. His eyes were glazed over in shock as he stared at the hideous incision.

"Oh my god!" Julie screamed, nearly collapsing from the awful sight. Brandon was now howling in pain and clutching the gaping wound in horror. His hands became soaked with sticky red blood and he screamed again.

Brandon stared into Julie's eyes and gasped, "Run!" through his blood-filled mouth. He fell backward on the bed and shuddered involuntarily as the blood puddled to the floor. His fingers curled closed and his eyelids shut.

Michael Myers suddenly jumped up from beneath the sheet where he had been hiding, tossing Brandon's body onto the linoleum floor. He raised the knife and began stumbling toward Julie.

Julie cried out involuntarily and felt the room and the darkness closing in on her.

She forced herself to run out into the dark hallway. She banged on doors and clawed at windows as she made her way toward the end. The sound of her own screaming pierced her eardrums.

Brandon was dead!

And she was going to die too.

Julie knew that she was running toward a dead end, but her feet kept moving anyway to escape the unimaginable horror that was chasing her, the monster just yards away that was trying to steal her life.

She reached the end of the hallway and pressed her face against the plate glass window. She could see the broken cars and the rental truck parked on the ground below. Her heart thudded rapidly when she glanced backward and saw Michael Myers stumbling toward her with the bloody instrument clasped in his hand. His white plastic mask was spattered with blood and the straitjacket was stained with deep crimson patches.

"My god my god my god...," Julie mumbled, pressing her back against the icy cold window. Every layer of sanity fell to the floor. Her mouth was forced into a silent scream as Michael Myers moved toward her. There was nowhere to run to. Nowhere to hide.

He raised the bloodied knife above his deformed head and took another step.

"Somebody! Help me!" Julie screamed.

Knowing that no one could help her now, she pressed her body tightly against the glass. She looked down again.

It was her only chance.

She forced herself to face the shadowed monster that was approaching. Panic numbed her limbs and mind, choking out all rational thoughts.

In a last attempt to save her life, Julie ran back a few steps and hurled her body at the window. She babbled to herself insanely as she made contact with the window. Glass shattered and she let out a horrified scream. The ground, two stories below, closed in at lightning-fast speed. In an instant her head smacked against something rock hard, snapping her neck in half.

Michael Myers stood before the shattered plate of glass in the pitch-black corridor. A few strands of silky black hair remained caught in the jagged, glittery shards.

His black, soulless eyes peered down at the girl below, whose broken body lay across a crumbling, angelic cherub atop the old fountain. Her neck stuck out at a crooked angle and blood trickled across her pale face from her open mouth, dripping into the dry pool.

In the basement, Eddie protectively put his arm around Christine. They sat across the table from Dr. Blackwell, who was scribbling notes on a piece of paper. The old man crumpled the paper in a ball and threw it across the room in frustration. "It won't work!" he hissed, burying his head in his hands.

"W-what won't work?" Christine stammered.

The old man raised his head. His frozen eyes revealed a tortured, aching soul. He sighed. "The trap that you two fell into. I set it for him. But now it's ruined. We don't have time to repair it."

"Is there a window down here? Maybe we could break out and make a run for the highway," Eddie suggested hopefully.

"The basement and first-floor windows are secured with iron grills," the doctor told him, his face becoming a steely mask again. "I barricaded off the staircase down here with bricks and cement. The only way out is through the laundry chute."

"But the door up there in the hallway is locked!" Christine cried. "And he might still be in there waiting for us!"

The old man fumbled in his pocket and extracted a ring of keys. "Ah. But I have the keys to every door in this place," he stated. His expression became dark and he stared at Eddie, holding his gaze. "We'll have to take our chances. If we wait down here, he'll certainly find us before daybreak."

The thought of crawling back up the steep laundry chute made Christine tremble with fear. Even if they could make it up, what would be waiting for them up there in that pitch-black hallway?

The old man shook his head suddenly, as if he were remembering something. He turned to Eddie. "You said you came here to film ghosts. What did you use as a power source?"

Eddie didn't understand where the conversation was going. He answered, "The generator we brought. But..."

Dr. Blackwell rose from the table, his tall form resembling a shadowy old oak tree. "You must take me to it. I have a plan that may work if we have a power source. Let's go!"

Eddie protested, "But what if he's up there and—"

The old man cut him off. "If we hide here, we will all certainly die. That, I know." He turned and removed a shotgun from a rack inside the cabinet behind him. He whirled around. "Move!" he ordered, poking the barrel of the gun at the startled teenagers.

Eddie tensed up and Christine jumped to her feet in surprise as the blood rushed to her head. Was he going to shoot them if they didn't go along with the plan? She didn't want to find out, so she reluctantly

followed Eddie up the steep, narrow chute.

Upstairs, the barrel of the shotgun poked up out of the chute after Eddie and Christine. For a moment, she considered grabbing it from the crazy old man, but then she remembered that she had no idea how to use it. Besides, he would lead them to safety... she hoped.

Dr. Blackwell wheezed and struggled to pull his ancient body through the chute. "Help me, you idiots," he hissed through clenched teeth.

Eddie gave him a hand and pulled the decrepit old man out. Eddie and Christine cowered behind the doctor, who poked the muzzle into the open room. "He's gone," the old man whispered.

Christine trembled and stared off into the darkness. "Where did he go?" she asked fearfully.

"He could be anywhere," Dr. Blackwell said. "He knows his way around this hospital better than anyone. We've got to be very careful."

The thought of Michael Myers hiding somewhere in the building made Eddie's stomach tighten up into a ball of nerves. "The generator is down in the lobby," he whispered hoarsely.

After Dr. Blackwell opened the locked door in the hallway, the group made their way quickly down the stairs toward the lobby, knowing that the nightmarish monster could be watching them or hiding in some dark corner, waiting to strike.

A warm breeze wafted through the splintered, shattered front doors in the lobby, carrying the acrid smell of burning fuel and death from the blazing fire up on the highway.

Christine stepped around the debris and noticed that one of the doors had been ripped off its hinges. She pointed to the highway. "It's still burning! Help should be there any minute. Let's go up to the highway and wait."

"No!" Dr. Blackwell whispered. His nostrils flared. "There's no time! He'll find us out there!" He pointed the gun at Eddie while unlocking a door adjacent to the front doors of the lobby. "Bring the generator in here!" he ordered.

Eddie did as he was told, pushing the generator into a dusty room that he guessed must have once been the main office. A few desks with old-fashioned typewriters and telephones on them still sat undisturbed. Christine gawked as mildew and must filled the thick air in the room and spots on the ceiling sagged inward from water damage.

The old man frantically ordered Eddie to place the generator next to a counter with an old microphone embedded on top. He ducked behind the wooden counter and began furiously dismantling wires. "This is the

intercom system," he explained. "We'll fire it up and I'll coax him down here."

"Oh no! Please!" Christine pleaded. "Let's get out while we can!"

"No," the old man warned. "We wouldn't have a chance." He grabbed the power cord on the generator and began attaching the wires to it. He continued, "Michael Myers always wanted things to be normal again and to be able to go home and stay there. So we're going to make him think that that can happen. I need you two to help me or it won't work."

"This is insane!" Eddie hissed. "It will never work! He's a madman! He's murdered our friends. You can't reason with insanity! You can't—"

Suddenly footsteps became audible traveling along the floor above. The old man glanced up and smiled toothlessly. "Well. It's a little too late for plan B, now isn't it?" he said calmly. "That's our boy up there. I'd recognize that shuffle anywhere." He cranked the handle on the generator and the old piece of machinery rattled to life.

"Maybe it's Julie and Brandon or Stanley and Randy," Christine pointed out weakly. "Maybe they're okay," she said, breaking into sobs, knowing darn well that they weren't okay.

Dr. Blackwell didn't have to say anything more. Anyone else being alive was nearly out of the question given the circumstances. Eddie recalled finding Stanley's radio and seeing the bloody mess on the floor.

He didn't have to see the bodies. He knew that something terrible had happened.

A feeling of dread grabbed hold of him and he knew that whatever the old man was planning was their only hope for escaping this nightmare with their lives.

Without warning, the old intercom system buzzed throughout the building. Christine screamed and covered her ears. "Turn it off!" she screeched over the horrible noise.

Dr. Blackwell raised his shotgun. "You two. Over there in front of the door!" he ordered.

"What!" Eddie yelled. "We're not going out there! Are you crazy!"

The old man flipped off the safety latch on the gun. His maddened eyes burned into the teenage couple. "I said get in front of the door. Just stand there and don't move until I signal! Now!" he rasped.

Christine felt as if she were trapped in a nightmare that she couldn't wake from as she and Eddie stepped into the lobby at gunpoint. Eddie wrapped his arms around her and she shook with uncontrollable sobs. He glanced out the broken door at the fire still burning up on the highway. The emergency vehicles had not arrived on the scene yet. He wondered how much longer it would take for someone to make the call.

"Please god! Somebody come!" he silently prayed. Video camera still

in hand, Eddie turned it on without the doctor noticing.

With the shotgun in one hand and the microphone in the other, the insane old man began speaking in a smooth, gentle voice over the intercom. "Michael Myers. This is Dr. Blackwell, the hospital administrator. Please report to the main lobby. Your mommy and daddy are here to take you home."

Rage and fury swept over Eddie. "You're using us, you bastard! You're setting us up!" he screamed at the old man. As he began to lunge toward the doctor, a shadowed figure suddenly appeared at the bottom of the stairs.

It was Michael Myers.

Eddie and Christine stood frozen in front of the door as the dead, lifeless eyes danced over them curiously from behind the mask.

Christine felt as if her body were on fire with panic and she struggled to keep her mouth closed.

Dr. Blackwell coaxed over the intercom, "You see, Michael? There they are. You're mommy is crying because she's so happy to see you. You can go home now, Michael, because you've been a good boy. It's okay. Go on."

Michael Myers lurched forward, one heavy step at a time. His dented head was cocked to the side as he moved toward the silhouettes that stood before him.

The only living thing about his mangled body was his glinting, evil eyes and rattled breathing.

Christine felt as if millions of insects were crawling across her flesh as her eyes widened in horror. She could no longer hold back her screams. Her mouth opened and her eyes closed involuntarily as the sound of her own high-pitched voice filled the room. She had to escape from this madness. Now or never.

Michael Myers stopped dead in his tracks and the curious gaze instantly turned to hatred and deceit.

Christine clawed at the front door of the building as Michael Myers moved closer. Except now his outstretched arms reached for her throat.

In a split second, Eddie saw Dr. Blackwell raise the gun from the next room. Eddie threw his body on top of Christine and they crashed to the floor as the bullet exploded from the rifle, hitting Michael Myers in the head.

A pitiful wail escaped from Michael Myers's mouth and he stumbled backward. A trickle of blood drizzled down his white mask.

Christine screamed and backed into the far corner of the room. Eddie looked around desperately for another way out. "My god!" Eddie cried out, his heart pounding.

Michael Myers began moving toward the old man, who cursed as he

fired the gun again and again. Even the piercing bullets that sank into Michael Myers's chest didn't stop him.

Eddie watched transfixed as Michael Myers stumbled toward the old man.

"Stop him!" Dr. Blackwell screamed. "Somebody help me!"

Christine covered her eyes, whimpering, and Eddie stared as Michael Myers plucked the skinny old doctor from behind the counter and began strangling him with the cord of the microphone.

The doctor struggled and kicked as Michael Myers gripped his neck from behind. Dr. Blackwell's foot slammed into the generator. The old machine tumbled to the floor and whined.

The acrid stench of Michael Myers filled Christine's nostrils and she screamed again.

Eddie grabbed Christine by the hand and scooped the camera up as the generator sputtered to a stop.

CHAPTER

19

Eddie and Christine traveled back into the bowels of the building. Out of the corner of her eye, Christine saw Michael Myers's filthy hands drop the limp body of the old man to the floor like a wet rag. His evil eyes fixed upon the fleeing couple and he stumbled through the darkness after them.

Down the dark corridor, Eddie dragged Christine through the first door he saw. The sign outside read "Group Therapy Room."

"No!" Christine whimpered. "We've got to get out! He's going to kill us!"

Eddie slammed the door behind them and tried to catch his breath. All he could see were the black walls and the image of Michael Myers.

Suddenly Christine gasped and fell to the floor screaming, a terrified noise. She was babbling and pointing hysterically while tugging at Eddie's pant leg.

His eyes adjusted to the darkness. Eddie whispered over the pulsing beat of his own heart and could not hear his own voice, "Oh god no! No!"

Black blood glistened across the linoleum floor and several motionless figures were seated in a circle of chairs around the room. The bloodied faces of the missing film crew stared back at Eddie through dull, glazed, dead eyes. The choking reek of death filled the air and Eddie screamed. "Dead! They're all dead! My god!"

Christine could smell the fresh blood. She could almost taste it. She tried to look away from the bruised, butchered carcasses, but could not. She stared at the bodies of her friends. The shocked and mortified expressions upon their blood-drained faces told the story of what had happened— what horrors they had seen.

Eddie backed away a few paces in a daze and his foot bumped into something that rolled. He looked down and saw Jason's severed head staring up at him.

"Aaaaaaugh!" he screamed, stepping away from the sickening mess. Another wave of panic washed over him as his eyes searched the room.

Christine clutched at Eddie, trembling with shock, and her eyes widened as another series of pitched screams rattled out of her raw throat.

Eddie could barely think. He shook as his eyes darted around the dark room. "This can't be happening! It can't be!" he whispered hoarsely.

"We've got to get out!" Christine managed to squeak. "Please, Eddie! We've got to get away before he—"

And then Eddie's heartbeat quickened. Heavy footsteps clunked

behind the closed door. His flesh began to crawl and he knew that they were not alone. He knew who it was and what was going to happen next.

The sound of a faint noise drifted underneath the doorway. Eddie pointed at the tiny window in the corner of the room. "It's our only chance!"

The door handle rattled violently.

Christine looked at the doorway and the window and then back to the doorway. "But the window has an iron grill over it! We can't get out! We're trapped in here!" A dull black shadow became visible underneath the doorway. She fought off the urge to scream again and forced herself to concentrate on getting out.

"We've got to try!" Eddie hoisted himself up to the window and pulled it open. Using all his strength, he pushed against the filthy, rusted grill. It didn't budge.

"Push harder!" Christine whispered, looking back at the door which seemed to be buckling inward from the force on the other side.

Eddie's eyes searched Christine's face. Her beautiful face. He had to save them somehow from this unimaginable nightmare.

At that moment, the door crashed open and the hulking body of Michael Myers was framed in the splintered door way, illuminated by the gleaming moonlight that crept in through the barred window. Black blood soaked his bullet-riddled clothing.

Eddie pushed Christine into the corner, where she watched in horror as Michael Myers crashed across the room through the circle of dead bodies, knocking them off of their chairs.

Eddie lifted a metal chair and swung it at Michael Myers, who moved like a vaporous cloud of black mist. The crushing blow knocked the hideous monster back a few feet. But he regained his balance and hissed, drawing back his bluish lips, revealing a set of rotted teeth through the mask.

Christine crawled on her knees, searching desperately for something to use as a weapon.

She could barely breathe through the suffocating panic that seemed to pollute every particle of her body. Christine grabbed something and realized that it was Julie's pulseless wrist. Her neck was blackened from the break. Christine let out another scream.

Eddie swung the chair again at Michael Myers, which made him stumble backward again. In that moment of weakness, Eddie swung again and again in fear and anger, beating against the sunken chest and weakened bones until the body finally lay still. He kicked the legs of Michael Myers through the doorway into the hallway.

The smell of death was choking. Eddie stood on the chair again and pressed his face against the grill on the window and greedily sucked in

the fresh air from outside.

He pushed again and felt the ancient grill move a little. He pushed again, harder and harder. Christine stood on the chair with him and helped. Eddie could see the cement breaking loose on the outside.

"Push!" Christine screamed, her voice cracking. "Come on! Push!"

The bottom corners of the grill broke free with another shove.

Christine looked over her shoulder and saw that Michael Myers's body was missing. "Eddie!" she screeched. "He's gone! He's—"

Suddenly, Eddie and Christine crashed to the floor as the chair was knocked out from under their feet. Eddie landed flat on his back and the breath had been knocked out of his lungs. Without warning, Michael Myers's hands slammed Eddie's head against the ground. The decayed teeth behind the mask were bared and Michael Myers's hand clasped in a death grip around Eddie's neck, choking the life out of him.

A loud blast boomed through the room and Michael Myers loosened his grip. The weight of his body fell forward in a heap on top of Eddie.

Dr. Blackwell stood hunched in the doorway holding a smoking shotgun with his bloodied, withered fingers. His face was bluish and a deep, bleeding wound stretched across his neck. His hair and coat were soaked with his own blood. He croaked, "Get out! Get out of here!"

Christine pulled Eddie's body out from under the massive hulk of Michael Myers's blood-soaked form. "Come on!" she shouted to the old man.

Dr. Blackwell closed his eyes in defeat and collapsed backward into the shadows of the corridor.

Christine looked away as his body writhed and withered. It was too late to save him.

Eddie stared down at the massive lump on the floor and took Christine's trembling hand in his. "This is it. Let's get out of here!" he shouted.

Eddie and Christine hoisted themselves out the window and squeezed through the cracked grate. Christine fell on her back on the ground below, coughing and gasping. Eddie stumbled to her side and wrapped his arms around her. "We're safe now," he told her, stroking her hair gently.

Christine's eyes searched his face. "Why?" she whispered. "Why?"

"I don't know," Eddie answered blankly. "We'll never know." He pulled her to her feet and toward the fire up on the highway.

The glass on the window above suddenly shattered and a dark, bloody hand emerged from out of the remnants of the window. The hand of Michael Myers grasped the sill and began to heave the weight of his body through the opening.

Christine gasped when she noticed the shadowed figure scaling down

the black wall of the old building. "Run, Eddie! He's coming after us!" she screeched.

From miles away, the faint whining of sirens could be heard. Eddie stood there transfixed for a moment. "Come on!" he shouted. "The police are on their way!"

Eddie dragged Christine by the hand along the tall fences of iron, searching for a way out. He squeezed her hand tightly. He wasn't going to let her slip away. Not now. Not ever.

In a blind dash, they ran across the grounds, not looking back at the building looming behind them.

Eddie finally stopped running when they reached the front gates of the hospital, where he found them locked by a thick chain. There was no way out! Eddie banged his head against the solid gates in frustration.

Christine suddenly began whimpering. Not more than twenty yards behind them came crashing noise through the weeded landscape. Eddie twisted around and saw Michael Myers stumbling in their direction. "Oh no! No!" he screamed.

With no time to think, Eddie pulled Christine across the gravel and motioned for her to crawl into the back of the rental truck.

Eddie placed a hand over Christine's mouth in an attempt to silence her frightened cries. Something gleaming caught Eddie's eye and he picked up a crowbar from beneath the sagging truck.

A dark shadow slowly approached the couple as beads of sweat dripped down Eddie's forehead. He gripped the crowbar tightly and hoisted his body up on the roof of the truck.

The footsteps came closer—just a few feet away now. The sound of rattled breathing filled the air. Eddie poised himself, ready to strike. Michael Myers lurched toward the back of the truck.

Eddie shrieked and flung his body off the truck onto Michael Myers. Michael Myers's huge body crumpled to the ground from the sudden attack from above.

Eddie heard himself screaming, as he stood above the hideous monster and pummeled its head over and over again with the heavy metal bar. Blood splattered into Christine's face as she jumped out of the back of the truck and screamed, pulling Eddie away from the still, bloodied body. "Let's go!" she yelled.

Eddie allowed himself to be led away from Michael Myers. His transfixed gaze suddenly focused on Christine's face. "He's dead," he croaked.

"I wouldn't bet on it!" she whispered. "We've got to get out! Now!" she warned, handing Eddie a massive pair of wire cutters she had found in the bed of the truck.

Eddie clipped at a link of the heavy chain with the dull cutters until it

finally snapped in half. Christine hastily unhooked the link and unwrapped the chain.

Through the wooded field they ran away from the deteriorating old insane asylum.

When they crossed the ditch and stepped onto the highway, the emergency crews had just arrived. A paramedic whisked them away to check them out for injuries. The terrified couple sat in the back of the ambulance, still holding hands as they explained to a startled police officer what had happened in the abandoned hospital.

EPILOGUE

The police officer finally finished his questioning and sent a team down to investigate the murders after the fire had been put out on the highway.

The first rays of morning sun crept over the mountainside as Christine and Eddie were whisked away in a squad car to answer more questions down at the station.

Eddie placed his hand on Christine's knee and looked into her eyes. "It's over. Thank god it's over. We're alive."

Christine shook her head sadly and began sobbing for all of their friends who hadn't been so lucky. "I know. I know."

Eddie whispered, "We'll dedicate the documentary to our friends."

Christine stared at him through red, tear-swollen eyes. "But... they all died for nothing. Absolutely nothing."

Eddie patted his vest. "I've got the video camera right here. We've got enough tape here to put together a really nice memorial piece."

"They'd have liked that, Eddie," she whispered. "They'd have liked that a lot."

The police teams entered the old building.

From high up on the hillside a pair of eyes watched the flurry of activity around the hospital below.

The figure clad in black let out a tortured wail and stumbled through the trees, away from the noise and voices.

Away from the only home he knew.